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# The Christ in Modern English Literature

By GEORGE HAMILTON COMBS

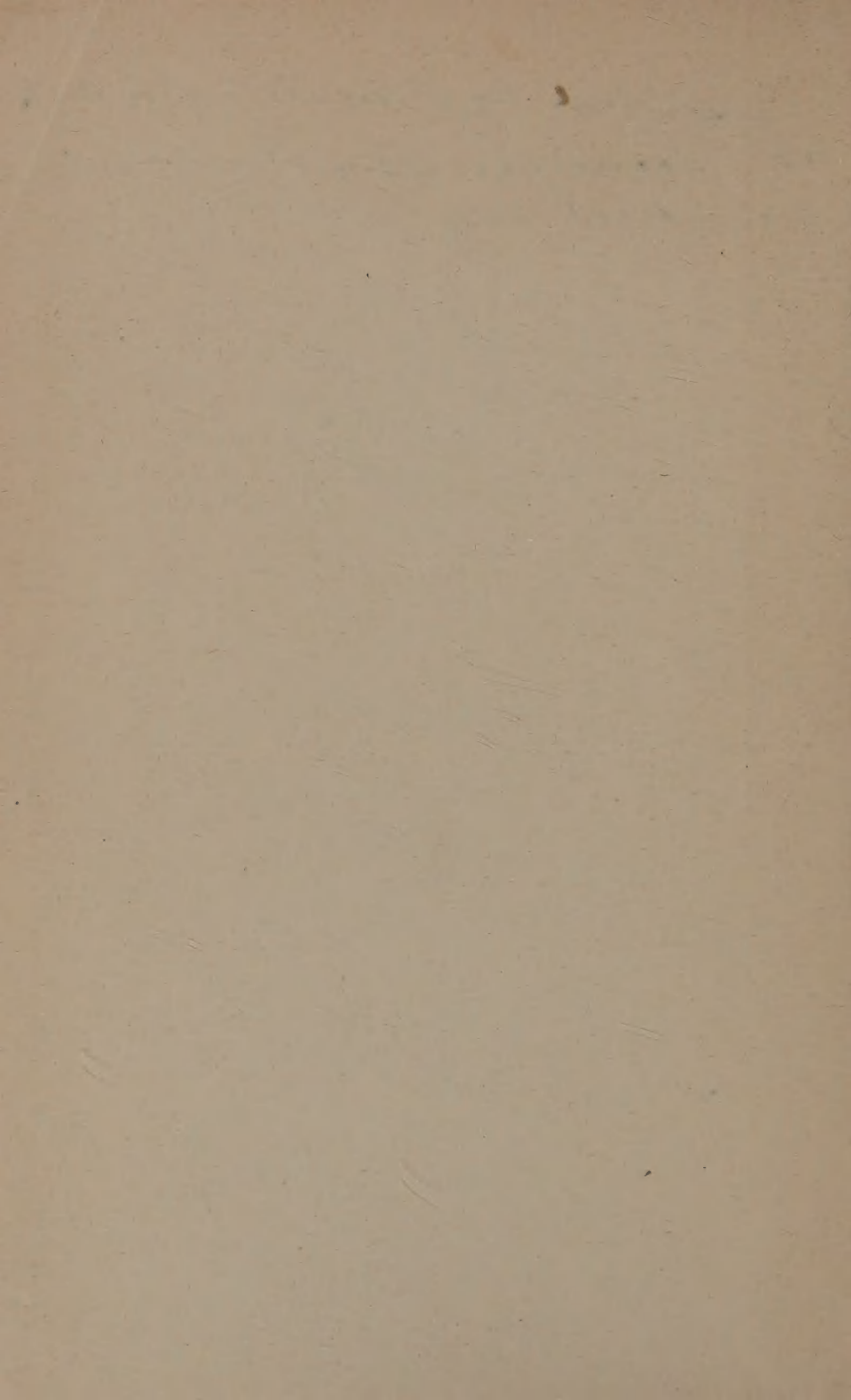
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THE CHRIST IN MODERN  
ENGLISH LITERATURE



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# The Christ in Modern English Literature

BY  
GEORGE HAMILTON COMBS

Author of "Some Latter-Day Religions,"  
"The New Socialism."



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TO MY  
MOTHER AND FATHER

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## FOREWORD.

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THE Christ in Art has proven a congenial theme for many latter-day writers. The Christ in Modern Theology has been the inspirational subject of some of the most profound and fascinating studies of our times. But, and most inexplicable, of the Christ in Modern Literature we have heard not many words. The *theology* of this literature has been dealt with by gifted expositors; its *ethic*, too, has found interpreters, but to its *Christology* thus far we have not been directed.

This volume is offered as a pioneer and elementary work in this most fruitful field. While the writer is deeply sensible of its defects and its limitations, he yet cherishes the hope that in slight measure, at least, it may be found a help towards a richer and fuller understanding of the Christ as he is revealed by the present day makers of the literature of power.



THE SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE  
OF THE ENQUIRY

“Through the harsh noises of our day  
A low sweet prelude finds its way;  
Through clouds of doubt and creeds of fear  
A light is breaking, calm and clear.”

—Whittier.

“The literary revival preceded the critical, helped to determine both its spirit and its problems, the attitude of the mind as well to religion as to religious ideas, their forms and their history. . . . The new sense of His historical being and transcendence is reflected in the changed tone and attitude of literature. The ethical idealization of Schiller and the rather benevolent or condescending allusions of Goethe, as of one speaking from a lofty height concerning another who had struggled upward to a lower standpoint, are now unknown. The two most illustrious poets of our era were distinguished by their feeling, not for the abstract and ideal, but for the concrete and historic, Christ.”—*The Place of Christ in Modern Theology (Fairbairn) pp. 193, 294.*

## I.

### THE SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ENQUIRY.

It is always well at the outset to know as precisely as one may just what is to be undertaken, and the meaning of it. Before starting on a journey, no matter how slight and hurried, it is best to know exactly its *where* and its *why*. An outline itinerary then is first in order. De Quincey, if his familiar classification may once more be cited, divides literature into two classes: the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. This study will have to do only with the latter. The Standard Dictionary in more elaborate definition says: "Literature in its narrowest, strictest sense, belongs to the sphere of high art and embodies thought that is power-giving or inspiring rather than merely knowledge-giving (excluding thus all purely scientific writings); catholic or of interest to man (as excluding writings that are merely technical or for a class trade or profession or the like only), esthetic in its tone and style, and shaped by the creative imagination or power of artistic construction."\*

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\*Standard Dictionary, article Literature.

## Christ in English Literature

It is in the sense of this definition the term literature is here used.

There is something of comforting assurance in observing the mass of material thus ruled out. Scientific writings are barred. It is an open question, to be sure, if some of these writings fall not within the pale of the literature of *power*, if they be not inspiring and not "merely knowledge-giving." Much of the work of Huxley, Lyell, Drummond—to go no further—would seem to run amuck this arbitrariness of exclusion, but let the dictionary remain the autocrat. Along with science goes philosophy. This literature is also "technical," for "a class," knowledge-giving rather than "elevating"—in strictness no literature at all. Into these confines then we may not range. And now as to theology. Shall this also go? Shall the "queen" of all the sciences be permitted to speak? Are theological writings literature? In part, at least, the definition seems to be satisfied. These writings are certainly "catholic or of interest to man," and not "for a class or a trade only," and surely, if anywhere, shall we find here "embodied thought that is power-giving rather than merely knowledge-giving." If literature is that which concerns itself with the ideal, should not the students of theology, which of all things has most to do with the ideal, create

## Scope and Significance

a literature? It would so seem. And yet this reasonable expectation is unmet, for, alas! while possessing all else, all materials and inspirations of literature, these writings are not shaped by the creative imagination or power of artistic construction. Put as an all-inclusive dictum, this statement would be defamation. Exceptions there are, and now and then in the welter of the formless, some gracious miracle of beauty greets the eye, but the mention of the occasional only accentuates the ugliness of the mass. Jeremy Taylor, with his splendid masteries of style and saving sense of beauty, serves to remind you of the thousand John Howes with their barbarous English; the pellucid manner of a Peabody or a Phillips Brooks brings out, through disheartening contrast, the language mediocrities of the great majority of their compeers. No great theological work of this century is notable as a work of literature, and any claims of theology to immortality in this province must rest upon the slender output of less than a score of pulpits. It may be said that theology has had nobler aims than the construction of a literature having to do, and strenuously, with fact rather than with form, with life rather than with art, and that it has but sacrificed the good upon the altar of the best. Be it so. To enquire into the causes of theology's literary non-produc-

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tiveness is beyond our purpose. It is enough to point out, without attempt at explanation, this surprising unfruitfulness in a most promising field, and through ever narrowing theme-limitation come the closer to our study. In the light of the definition at the outset, with the above enforced exclusions, the term literature is here used.

The word "modern" is elastic, and may be made to fit any arbitrariness of time-division. In this study it is stretched roughly over the field outlying between the to-day and Robert Burns.

It may not be inappropriate at the threshold of our enquiry, to observe that should there be found in this volume a lack of nice analysis and delicate criticism, it should be remembered that these niceties are by no means characteristic of popular literary treatments of theological questions. Few of the authors who shall pass before us had any perfected theological system, and a just and sympathetic exposition of their views must partake of this formlessness. Indeed, not only is there a lack of coherence, system, in their religious opinions, but an undisguised contempt for system. The artist refuses to be trammelled by a creed. The man of genius outsoars the petty barriers of any order. The dreamer cares not to run amuck any cordon of dogma. The poet, the dramatist,

## Scope and Significance

the romancer, has usually but slight knowledge of a technical theology, approaches religious themes by other than seminary roads, and in all revealments of personal beliefs is unconventional, unsystematic, which is to say spontaneous and helpful.

This literature is not only formless, but, from the standpoint of the precisian, inconsistent. "Consistency," says Emerson, "is the hobgoblin of little minds," and, whether to clear themselves from the suspicion of littleness or in obedience to their "bent," most writers revel in this genius-license, and are naively inconsistent and contradictory in the discussion of religious themes. If, then, in this exposition, we shall come to nebulousness, or worse—contradiction, let it be remembered that we are dealing with geniuses who are above logic and system even as the Roman king was above grammar, geniuses whose ambitious Pegasus spurns the feel of common earth, eager to bound along the radiant track thick-sown with cloud and star. In a word, literature in its treatment of theological questions knows nothing of line—is fragmentary and unsystematic.

This literature is to the student of religion invaluable, because it is at once the mirror of the faiths of the to-day and a prophecy of the to-morrow, revealing and creating, uncovering the present, shaping the future, showing what

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men believe now, showing also what they will believe hereafter. The artist is always the seer. The genius is ever the prophet. The poet is the interpreter alike of that which is and that which is to be. It is to this literature men must go for a real knowledge of the real faith of our day. To shut one's self up to theology is to shut one's self *out* of a world that is well worth the knowing. The theologian may declare what men *ought* to believe; "secular" literature declares what they *do* believe. Its revelations may sometimes discourage, sometimes shock, but they are dependable. By some strange fatality the theologian is often removed from humanity as it is, and blunders in its interpretation. But this non-canonical literature knows its ground, and detects alike the premonitory shudderings of the coming storm or the faint silver arrows of the eastern sky that tell of the coming day. It knows that the conventional faith is not always the real faith of men, and this real faith, with sure prophecies, too, of the faith which is to be, it voices. The theologian may interpret a book or a system, this preacher unordained interprets the human heart. Not the least valuable theological education—is it too much to say?—is the education that is not technically theological, the education that comes, if we may slip on Mr. Arnold's phrasing, from the knowledge of the

## Scope and Significance

"best that has been said and written in the world." But be this an over or under-statement, with the attitude of this literature towards the Nazarene, we must be most seriously concerned.



THE NEW FEELING FOR CHRIST

"Everywhere that literature is pervaded by greater reach of thought, increased tenderness, finer aspiration. In most of its greater points there is something of the

"Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore"—  
the stretching forth the hands in yearning to a further shore."—  
*Culture and Religion (Shairp)*, p. 50.

"Whatever may be said of the literature of the present generation, it cannot be justly charged with indecency or indecorum of sentiment, with flippant skepticism or rude blasphemy of speech. Its moral sympathies are elevated and its language studiously decorous and reverential. The spiritual truths which faith accepts and the faith which warmly cleaves to them, are both honored with studious respect. . . . The Christian motives, the Christian life, the characteristically Christian virtues are warmly recognized as the highest and purest of all human experiences and the nearest real approximations to the ideals of ethical and spiritual realization. It is not too much to say that the philosophy, the history, the poetry and the criticisms of the present era are, to a large extent, positively and avowedly Christian."—*Science and Sentiment (Porter)*, p. 491.

## II.

### "THE NEW FEELING FOR CHRIST."

IN his epochal book, "The Place of Christ in Modern Theology," Principal Fairbairn declares that "the most distinctive and determinative element in modern theology is what we may term a new feeling for Christ." This is profoundly true. As never before, theology is Christocentric. In the Christ is found the harmonizing of all truth. The Living One wears the honors once paid to dogma. To the cross the wise men are journeying for the interpretation of life. The great words of this eminent theologian ring true. Nor is this Christocentric tendency confined to theology. It characterizes literature also, and with equal truth it may be said that "the most distinctive and determinative element in *modern literature* is what we may term a new feeling for Christ." Beyond all questioning, a new feeling for the Master pulses through the thought of the present century as that thought finds utterance in its literature. It is not, in Matthew Arnold's phrasing, that we are "reconceiving—the Christ"—the suggestion is too ambitious but rather that for the first time literature, as literature, has a sight of His face and thrills

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with a sense of His presence. The story of the journeying of the magi, to the wonderful Child, is being retold to-day in the pilgrimages of litterateurs to Bethlehem and their incense offerings of praise. Christ words, Christ ideals, Christ inspirations—these have fallen upon the literature of our day and glorified it. It is not that we are burdened with preachment and that literature has become the vehicle of a mechanical morality; it is not that even the divine Person in its radiant glory is always recognized and greeted with reverential acclaims; it is, on the contrary, the interpenetration of Christian sentiments in all departments of letters and the felt consciousness that this change of spirit, of tone, of atmosphere, is due to a power, a someone, heretofore only dimly recognized, uncatalogued, and yet ever henceforth because of this might of determination to be included in all the interpretations of life. It is a change of thought, but it is more than that, it is a change of mood, of spirit, of feeling. It is, recurring to Principal Fairbairn's phrasing, "a new *feeling* for Christ."

This change is food for wonderment. To what must we look for an explanation of this revolution with its vast accompanying meanings? How comes it that literature has caught up the song heard by the shepherds on Judæan hills, and that the Man of Galilee is treated at

## The New Feeling for Christ

least with the beauty of sweet seriousness if not with the reverence of worship?

Among other causes is the advent of the scientific spirit. Now, while unquestionably the debt of letters to science is being enormously exaggerated, literature, in the long run, must inevitably be influenced by science, not only by its conclusions, but by its method and its spirit as well. Upon literature science must leave its impress. What mythology was to the literature of Greece and Rome, science will in some measure be to the literature of to-day. To the wonderful revelations of science, literature must key itself, and from the ever-widening heavens draw larger inspirations. All this is more than theory; it is a fact. Already has this new force made itself felt in letters.

The foremost word of science to-day is evolution. Whether this doctrine be true or false, there is no need now to enquire. Pronouncements upon science are for the specialists, and only such have value. Nor does its truth or untruth affect this study. It is enough to know that evolution is *thought* to be the talismanic, conjuring word, the open sesame to all mysteries, the explanation of all the phenomena of life. This is the key most used.

But how has evolution affected the Christ problem? The answer is not difficult. To begin, it compels attention to the Christ story.

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So powerful a factor in social and moral development as Christianity must be dealt with. The scientist must be observer, and this force that bulks so large must be enquired into and its claims examined.

"We live at a time," says Mr. Kidd, "when science counts nothing insignificant. She has recognized that every organ and every rudimentary organ has its utilitarian history. Every phrase and attribute of life has its meaning in his eyes; nothing has come into existence by chance. What, then, are these religious systems which fill such a commanding place in man's life and history? What is their meaning and function in social development? . . . These religious phenomena are certainly among the most persistent and characteristic features of the development which we find man undergoing in society. No one who approaches the subject with an unbiased mind, in the spirit of modern evolutionary science, can for a moment doubt that the beliefs represented must have some immense utilitarian function to perform in the evolution which is proceeding." Mr. Kidd quotes Mr. Cotter Harrison on the decay of religion, and M. Renan, who says, "Religious beliefs will die slowly out, undermined by primary instruction and by the predominance of scientific over literary education," and continues: "But no greater mistake can be

## The New Feeling for Christ

made than to imagine that there is anything in evolutionary science at the end of the nineteenth century to justify such conclusions. On the contrary, the most notable result of the scientific revolution begun by Darwin must be to establish them on a foundation as broad and deep and lasting as any that the theologians have dreamt of.”\*

The interpretation of the universe by evolutionary science may not only be an ally of faith, as is contended by Mr. Kidd, but according to another eminent authority, Mr. Edward Caird, is faith's only succorer. “We are now shut up to the alternative either that there is no God and no revelation of Him, or that the revelation of God must be sought in the whole process of nature and history regarded as a development which finds its ultimate end and its culminating expression in the life of man as spiritual. This is the God whom alone it is now considered worth while either to assert or to deny. This is our highest faith, our deepest doubt, the faith which is supported by the most powerful utterances of modern poetry and philosophy, the doubt on which all the skepticism and agnosticism of the age are concentrated.”†

Whether or no we accept this magisterial

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\*“Social Evolution,” p. 23.

†“The Evolution of Religion,” Vol. I, p. 57.

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declaration, that the evolutionary faith is that "which is supported by the most powerful utterances of modern poetry and philosophy," at least we must agree with Mr. Kidd when he affirms that the evolutionist who sees nothing little in all the universe and believes nothing has come by chance, must enquire into "those religious beliefs which fill such a commanding place in man's life and history." And thus in his journeying must he come face to face with Christ. How will he interpret *Him*? Mayhap he will find in Him the final and highest product of evolution, as did Tennyson, as did Browning, as did Drummond, as did the theologian McCosh. To these the Christ appears as the very capstone of their scientific faith. They believe the Nazarene to be the goal of evolutionary forces, and they sing with the angels when that goal is reached. To their vision the world has come to its present estate through progressive gradations. At first chaos; then the rude outlines of a cosmos; then the lowest forms of animate life; then higher forms leading up to the animal, man; then the emergence of mind and the struggles of childish thought; then the birth of love, of the notions of right and wrong, and the "nascent human soul vaguely reaching forth toward something akin to itself not in the realm of fleeting phenomena, but in the Eternal Presence beyond";

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then—and lastly in their cosmic dream—the Perfect Man, the final evolution of love, incarnation of all beauty, goodness, truth, fulfillment of all the higher prophecies of humanity in other lives, the interpreter at once of the universe and of its God.

In Prof. Drummond's prose poem, "The Ascent of Man," this idea is fully wrought out. "Christianity," he says, "struck into the evolutionary process with no noise or shock; it upset nothing of all that had been done; it took all the natural foundations precisely as it found them; it adopted man's body, mind and soul at the exact level where Organic Evolution was at work upon them; it carried on the building by slow and gradual modifications; and through processes governed by rational laws it put the finishing touches to the Ascent of Man. No man can run up the natural lines of evolution without coming to Christianity at the top. One holds no brief to buttress Christianity in this way. But science has to deal with all facts, and the facts and processes which have received the name of Christian are the continuations of the scientific order, as much the successors of these facts as the facts and processes of biology are of those of the universal world. We land here, not from choice, but from necessity. Christianity is the Further Evolution." The coming of the Christ, according to Mr.

## Christ in English Literature

Drummond, was a scientific necessity. "This development through Ideals, the Perfect Ideal through which all others come, are the unique phenomena of the closing act—unique not because they are out of relation to what has gone before, but because the phenomena of the summit are different from the phenomena of the plain. Apart from these, there is nothing in Christianity which is not germ in nature. It is not an excrescence on nature but its efflorescence. It is not a side track where a few enthusiasts live impracticable lives on impossible ideals. It is the main stream of history and of science, the only current set from eternity for the progress of the world and the perfecting of a human race." \*

This philosophy has tangled itself in the dreams of many of the singers of our time. It is somewhat singular, as Miss Scudder has pointed out,† that at least three of the great poets of the century, Shelley, Browning and Tennyson, have anticipated the scientists in their recognition of this doctrine and, in messages delivered before the publication of Darwin's "Origin of Species" in 1859, expressed a clear conception of evolution as distinct from the then current idea of spasmodic and special creations. With these there is an abiding

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\* "Ascent of Man," pp. 343, 344.

† "The Life of the Spirit in Modern English Poets," p. 10.

## The New Feeling for Christ

sense of love ever working from darkest and obscurest beginnings towards the light, and a world through that love's sweet compulsion being brought to beauty. They see progress everywhere, see all things rushing towards perfection.

"Where is one that, born of woman, altogether can escape  
From the lower world within him, moods of tiger or of ape?  
Man as yet is *being made*, and ere the crowning Age of ages  
Shall not æon after æon pass and touch him into shape?

"All about him shadow still, but while the races flower and fade,  
Prophet eyes may catch a glory slowly gaining on the shade  
Till the peoples all are one, and all their voices blend in choric  
Hallelujah to the Maker: It is finished, *Man is made*." \*

Racial perfection, according to this Tennysonian vision, will not have come for æons yet, but the pledge of this perfection has already been given in the Perfect Man, the Furthest Evolution. There is no space here to follow the thought processes leading to such conclusions, nor desire to champion these scientific notions. Our task has to do with interpretation rather than with argument, and it suffices to declare that whatever may be the truth or untruth of Darwinism and its final place in the thought of the world, it has been, unless we question the moral integrity of these believers, to a most select circle, a quickening and confirmation of faith, lending new meanings and interest to the Christ story.

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\* "By an Evolutionist."

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Others, evolutionists too, have been brought to Christ along another way of approach. Evolution is a master word. They accept it. But here, squarely across their track, is the peasant of Galilee, who contradicts, to their thinking, the fundamental principles of their doctrine. *He* is no product of evolutionary forces. *He* is not the creature of his age. *He* is no summation of that which went before. *He* is not the normal flowering of his time. Evolution is large, but not large enough to include *Him*. Of all things else the interpreter, it fails to understand *Him*. Fairly across the grain of this doctrine does his life run. They come upon contradiction. The result? If the religious impulse is weak, rather than give up a theory this notable fact will be sacrificed and the Christ story pronounced unhistoric; if the religious impulse is strong, Faith will declare that this law of nature, explaining all things else, cannot explain the Christ who is outside the category of the natural; that therefore his *supernatural* character has been proved, and his heaven-sent mission authenticated.

Another cause of this new feeling for Christ is the growth of sociology. This word bulks large in modern thought. Social and complex phenomena are thrust upon the attention and await the interpretation of the artist as well as of the technical student. Says Hugo's

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Gwynplaine,\* "My lords, I bring you news, news of the existence of mankind." To the literature of modern times has come this news also—news of the existence of mankind. This, let it be understood, is to literature, "news." The literature that lies back of us is practically a stranger to this knowledge. With the people, with all that vast unsunned world over which we write the words plebeian, bourgeois, proletariat, it had nought to do. This literature deals with elegance, luxury, refinement, with men and women in brave array, and is a stranger to the lowly. Across its pages strides the knight, the courtier, the king; through its splendid periods sweep the rustling silks of My Lady; but of the toilers, of social wrongs and maladjustments, of world weariness and pain and the long struggle in the night there is no word. The literature of the middle ages, to go no further, is first of all aristocratic and speaks in the accent of the courtly. Nor did this patricianism lift with the darkness of those ages, and through the Renaissance, the Elizabethan Age, down to the very threshold of the present, it enwrapped the world of letters with its golden haze. Three names chosen at random attest the truthfulness of this critique—Chaucer, Spenser, Addison. Chaucer's is this aloofness from the people. His is the

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\* "The Man Who Laughs."

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freshest, sweetest voice of our English morning. But though his words are "garden sweet" as he sings of nature, though the daisies and the roses in his verse are always in virgin dewy bloom, for the people and their immemorial wrongs he has no vision. He seizes his harp and thrums:

"Above all the flowris in the mede  
Thune love I moste these flowris white and rede;  
Soche that men callin Daisies in our toun"; \*

but, alack, he who has such love for the daisy, has no voice of pity for the churl nor indignant protest against social wrongs. He can paint a Cresseide and a mooning Troilus who

"Took her in armes two and kissed her oft";

but the bent back and the lowly lot he did not paint because he would not see.

Spenser's voice, too, is that of the aristocrat. His "Faerie Queene" is simply a work of art, as cold in its tranquillity, as untouched by passion, as marbles chiseled by Greek hands. Lowell, with his unerring skill, has laid his finger upon Spenser's weakness, or at best his limitation, when he declares, "I very much doubt whether Spenser ever felt more than one profound passion in his life, and that, luckily, was for his 'Faerie Queene.'"† For the wres-

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\* "The Canterbury Tales."

† "Among My Books," p. 153.

## The New Feeling for Christ

things and problems of the society of his day he cared nothing. Into the dark alley where Want is, and the tenement where hides the pestilence, he could by no means have been brought. He loved his garden.

"The ways through which my weary steps I guide  
In this delightful land of Faerie,  
Are so exceeding spacious and wide  
And sprinkled with such variety  
Of all that pleasant is to ear and eye,  
That I, nigh ravisht with rare thought's delight,  
My tedious travail do forget thereby." \*

Spenser is the poet of the morning, of Beauty, of Love, but of humanity never.

"Ah, faithless Rosalind, and voyd of grace  
That art the root of all this ruthful woe,  
[My] teares would make the hardest flint to flow."†

Yet though he could weep over "faithless Rosalind," for a suffering humanity he never mourned.

Addison! Men read Addison, not for the grasp of his thought, but for the grace of his touch. Here is music with all its soft seductiveness, music slight, dainty, graceful, *shallow*. It has no reach to it, no compass, no mass. The vox humana sounds not through its elegant triflings, and the impressiveness of wide horizons and the tantalizing sweetness of mystery are wholly lacking. The "Spectator" is probably the most considerable literary output of the

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\* "Faerie Queene." † "Complaints."

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eighteenth century, and it is significant to note that nowhere from out these polished periods looks the face of Gwynplaine, the scarred, mutilated, ape-imbruted face of Humanity.

But a mighty change has been wrought. There has come the dawning of a new social consciousness. Literature begins to note humanity's solidarity, its interdependence; begins, too, to listen to its complaints, to be moved by its sorrows, and with tremulous eagerness is asking what to do. Literature, once an artist, is now also a philanthropist. Its heart-beat is beginning to be felt. Says that most discriminating and illumining critic, Miss Scudder: "From the days of 'Sartor Resartus' English prose has assumed a new social attitude. Its new dignity, its volume, scope and importance are due largely, though of course not wholly, to the candor and audacity with which it has rendered the larger collective facts, the fearful questions and tentative theories of an epoch more and more absorbed in social problems. The novelists and essayists who have swayed the public most have had varying claims to attention; but all, with one accord, have been social critics.'"\*

This awaking of the social consciousness is most notable in the world of fiction.

"At the very beginning of the period (the

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\* "Social Ideals in English Letters," p. 120.

## The New Feeling for Christ

Victorian) fiction turned away from donjon and tourney and sought for background the street, the club, the England of to-day. With occasional lapses into romanticism, it has remained insistently modern. The trend toward social interest has been only too strong, at times, for artistic freedom. From 'Oliver Twist' to 'Sir George Tressady,' social pictures, social problems, fill the scene. Dickens and Thackeray uncovered and revealed the social layers of early Victorian England. About 1850 their simple reproductions gave place to the novel of protest and arrangement; this in its turn is yielding nowadays to the novel of constructive suggestion, whether in the form of avowed literary Utopias, or of schemes for social salvation in would-be realistic garb. . . . Our social novels illustrate and supplement our social essays." \*

Now, all this means inevitably a new concern for Christ and a changed attitude toward Him. His teachings as they bear upon the social question are not to be ignored. The Sermon on the Mount is an invaluable thesaurus for all apostles of social reform. The Christ-spirit, too, the Christ-life and its relation to an ignorant and grief-stricken humanity must be taken into account, and more and more is it being felt that to the grave social problems that confront

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\* "Social Ideals in English Letters," p. 125.

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us, the Master, and he alone, has the key.

The coming of democracy has also contributed to this new feeling for Christ. Democracy has arrived. Thrones are tottering to their final overthrow. A king is an anachronism. The empire is no more. Democracy—big, black Democracy, as Carlyle savagely labeled it—is here and the present epic is “The Tools and the Man.” And democracy is the child of to-day. In no sense do we find its counterpart among the so-called democracies of Greece. These were but fictitious democracies, oligarchies the rather, only a thin crust of freedmen, and beneath it the welter of slavery. These were but the democracies of the aristocrat and not the democracies of man. Mr. Mae\* has clearly shown the world-wide difference separating between modern and ancient democracies, and the heart of this difference is the modern, the new, the Christian, realization of brotherhood. ( So, then, democracy, real, vital, all-leveling democracy, springs from the doctrine of the brotherhood of man. But whence came this belief in brotherhood? Whence came this doctrine that is something more than a phrase and with its wonderful dynamic? From the Peasant of Galilee. *He* is the iconoclast, the leveler, the abolitionist. *He* it is at whose birth the tocsin bells of revolution began

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\* “Democracy in Europe.”

## The New Feeling for Christ

to sound, whose every word was a philippic against an aristocratic pharisaism and whose life was one throbbing protest against the whole system of caste—the truest Democrat of all the ages, seeking not merely democracy in government and outward estate, but a democracy of sentiment and love. All students of democracy will come to see, as they examine the foundation of their temple, that it was laid not by French revolutionists, not by Swiss Immortals, not by English Protestants, not by sturdy Netherlanders, but by the Master-BUILDER himself. Literature, wrestling with the present, must therefore concern itself with those democratic forces and ideals, and so on fullest tide be brought to their Inspirer and Creator, the democratic Christ.)

More broadly and finally as to causes, the new seriousness that has come to literature is to be considered as a determinative force in bringing about this new feeling for Christ. The literature of the eighteenth century lacks earnestness. It is not seldom frivolous. It contents itself with form and polished elegance. It has no gospels to declare. It is conscious of no divine call. But a mighty change has been wrought. From the slight, the comic, the show of things, literature has passed to the weighty, the grave, the spirit. A new serious-

## Christ in English Literature

ness has come. This rich dower is not confined to a single literature. Upon all lands this spirit has breathed. Tolstoi, Dostoyevsky, Gogol, Turgenief, Ibsen, Amiel, Suderman, Maeterlinck—these, the givers of grave gospels, sounders of deepest seas, eager as Œdipus of old to wrest life's greatest meanings from the silent sphinx—show how universal is this new enduement. These literatures take themselves seriously. On all high themes they have a voice. Their range is encyclopedic. To the solution of all problems, political, social, religious, they set themselves with the might of earnestness and the daring of faith. The older literatures had to do with the outward. They did not portray men, but rather the trappings and the ranks of men. Into the penetralia of life they did not enter. For the individual as an individual there was no regard, concern for him chiefly as through twists of fate or fortune he detached himself from the mass, climbing by straight or devious ways toward a throne, or—which suited the artist quite as well—descending through innate viciousness or fate's malignity to slough of villainy or the horror of madness. A king upon his throne, a Job upon his ash-heap, a Faust in devil's grip, were all alike of interest to the author, interesting not because of what they were, but interesting *because of their posi-*

## The New Feeling for Christ

*tion.* But the mighty change has come. "They must be blind indeed," says Mr. Mabie, "who fail to discover in this attitude of literature towards men and women as individuals, a change of thought as vital as any that has ever taken place in history. The commonest life is touched and irradiated by this spirit of insight, and in the lowliest, as in the most impressive person and facts, an inexhaustible significance is discovered. . . . If Shakespeare were living to-day, his Lear might not be an uncrowned king, but the kinsman of that lonely massive peasant-figure whose essential and tragic dignity Turgenev has made so impressive in 'The Lear of the Steppes.' " \*

Obviously a literature so deep-toned and strong cannot, will not, ignore the Christ. With the body of his teachings, his life in its fleckless beauty, his death in its tragic sublimity, it will concern itself and speak wonderful words. And whether this literature shall attempt to catalogue the Christ, to analyze him, to comprehend him, or whether, attempting no analysis, no definition, no adequate comprehension, it is content to dream and be filled with a great awe; whether it shall revolt from his standard, disdaining such leadership, or affirm in prophetic hour that his are the words of eternal life and that his name shall be called

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\* "Essays in Literary Interpretation," p. 17.

## Christ in English Literature

“Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,” certain is it that the Christ can no longer be ignored, and that with him literature must concern itself, whether in the vehemence of dispraise, the anger of enmity or the fervor of worship.

THE LITERATURE OF SILENCE

"Of all the great names in literature none was so dear to him as that of Walter Scott, the noblest—as he delighted to call him—and purest writers of fiction, and one 'of the greatest religious teachers of Scottish Christendom.' 'I am,' he used to say, 'of the religion of Walter Scott.'"—*The Life and Correspondence of Arthur Penrhyn Stanley (Prothero)*, Vol. II., p. 384.

"Whatever may be said of Burns's religion, the practical result of much of his poetry in his age was to do similar work to that of Christ—to exalt and beautify the life of the poor, to make them feel that they were cared for and known of God."—*Theology in English Poetry (Stopford Brooke)*, p. 296.

### III.

#### THE LITERATURE OF SILENCE.

IT is a distinct disappointment, having learned of Literature's new feeling for Christ, to find that not an inconsiderable number of our noblest and largest men of letters have on all Christ themes fallen upon silence. What the deep thoughts of their hearts upon these grave questions that so dominate the hour, may never be known. In so far as any specific reference to Christ goes, this literature might have been fashioned in ante-Christian days. Looked at merely upon the surface, it is wholly without religious significance. Such a literature was that of Burns. Revealer and creator of Scotland, sweetest of all her singers, uncrowned laureate of the northern world, he has left us no recorded word concerning the Christ.

That Burns, despite all his lawless passions and his life's colossal wreckage, was at heart deeply religious, cannot be questioned. He had not only the Scot's love of moralizing, but lived, too, though so grossly sinning, in the quick consciousness of an ever-present God. He told Douglass Stewart that he could not bear to hear a skeptical joke. His mind was richly stored with Scripture texts, and deeply

## Christ in English Literature

pathetic is it to see this misguided genius, so "mighty and mightily fallen," gathering his little flock around him at Ellisland in the evening time for family worship and, following the good old Scotch custom, offering up prayer in his own words. Writing to Mrs. Dunlap, he says: "What a transient business is life. Very lately I was a boy; but the other day I was a young man and I already begin to feel the rigid fiber and stiffening joints of old age. With all the follies of my youth and, I fear, a few vices of manhood, still I congratulate myself in having had in early days religion impressed upon my mind."\* We can never be brought to believe in Burns as in heart irreligious, and though we hear him sing—

"An honest man may like a glass,  
An honest man may like a lass,  
But mean revenge an malice fause  
He'll still disdain;  
And then cry zeal for gospel laws  
Like some we ken.  
I rather would be  
An atheist clean,  
Than under gospel colours hid be,  
Just for a screen;"†

and though we listen to the wild, unbridled music of the "Jolly Beggars,"

"A fig for those by law protected,  
Liberty's a glorious feast;  
Courts for cowards were erected,  
Churches built to please the priest,"

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\* "Letters."

† "The Holy Fair."

## The Literature of Silence

we know that these are but the prophet fulminations of the sincere soul against the broidered Pharisaism and sanctimonious cant of the church rather than railings against the true temple with its unseen Lord. He who could write the "Cotter's Saturday Night" with its portrayal of the sweet and serious beauty of peasant life blossoming into an idyl as it fronts the Infinite, even though, as has been hinted, he was but therein depicting the national religion rather than his own personal faith, could never, with such sanity of appreciation of the well-springs of all that is noblest in state and family life, have been other than religion's friend. Yet the disturbing fact remains, that of the Divine Person he does not speak, and Principal Shairp is no doubt justified in affirming that "there is nothing in his poems or in his letters which goes beyond sincere deism—nothing distinctively Christian."\* The frankest of men, the most outspoken, hiding not even his grossest sins, concerning the place and power of the Nazarene he preserves the rigidity of silence.

One other of Scotia's great sons is a notable contributor to this literature of silence, Sir Walter Scott. Formally and specifically of religion this master speaks not at all. Scott

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\* "Life of Robert Burns," p. 119.

## Christ in English Literature

consciously estopped himself from all journeyings into theology. Of the supernatural he steered resolutely clear. Shelley, writing to a friend, says, "As to real flesh and blood, you know that I do not deal in these articles. You might just as well go to a gin shop for a leg of mutton as to expect anything human or earthly from me."\* Scott's bent was in quite a contrary direction. *He* dealt in flesh and blood, and in those only. Revolting from the mysticism of the delicate winged Shelley, he is unmistakably "human and earthly," grand and impressive in the ample sensuousness, the mountain loftiness, the tropical exuberance of his genius, its perfect poise and health, but lacking the noble perspectives, the subtle charms, the mysterious blends of light and shadow, the haunting sense of mystery that comes with the recognition of the supernatural, of powers and presences not earth-rooted.

"I should have become an enthusiast," he writes, "if I had indulged my mind on religious subjects."† Even this explanation hardly compensates us for the disappointment of his silence; so should we like to see him kneel before the Master and touch with reverential hands the hem of his garments.

But after all, is not this but sorry criticism?

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\* "Letters." † "Life (Lockhart)," Vol. 7, p. 43.

## The Literature of Silence

Shall we say that of the religion of these two, Scott and Burns, we know nothing because they have subscribed to no creed nor made formal pronouncements of their faith? Though theirs is no pulpit deliverance, have we not heard their voices in the work-shop and in the field? Though they have painted no portrait of the Master after the manner of a Dore, a Hoffman, a Munkacsy, a Vereschagin, whether the Christ of poesy, of labor and virility, or of agony, have they not spoken to us in the Christ accents and have they not preached his Gospels? The rose declares not the birthplace of its crimson, and yet we know that it came from the sun. And, though it does not so declare, there is a light on this literature that was borrowed from the Star of Bethlehem, and a music there that slipped from the harps of the angels that night of nights when to dreaming shepherds came a glory from the skies.

Christ aspirations, are they not voiced here? Christ doctrines, are they not taught here? Christ ideals, do they not irradiate and glorify these pages we had thought so barren? How *vocal* is this literature of *silence*! Go back to Burns. Two, at least, of the gospels he left us are pronouncedly Christian. One of these is his doctrine of democracy. This, as has been stated, is a distinctively Christian doctrine,

## Christ in English Literature

and in all the centuries, by none has it been more eloquently and impressively proclaimed than by the peasant preacher of Ayr. Caste he denounced with a furious zeal, and to all who, mindless of the essentials and regardful only of the outward and the accidentals of manhood, he comes with the ringing truth,

“The rank is but the guinea stamp,  
A man’s a man for a’ that.”\*

To the realization of democracy, of brotherhood—for these two are at core one—Burns saw no obstacle in labor. With the Christ vision he found only nobility in toil. Here he differs widely from a present day prophet, Mr. Edwin Markham. This singer is pre-eminently the poet of brotherhood. The supreme good is brotherliness,

“The crest and crowning of all good,  
Life’s final star, is brotherhood.”

To bring forth this good, the Christ from the nearing heaven, “his white, unfearing face shining out of the Social Passion,” shall come

“To hush and heroize the world  
Under the flag of brotherhood.” †

But to Mr. Markham, the principal obstacle to the realization of this dream is toil. In labor he sees no nobility, but only the primeval

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\* “Honest Poverty.” † “Brotherhood.”

## The Literature of Silence

curse and bitterness. He looks at Millet's picture, and flames forth in passionate indictment of social conditions.

"Is this the dream He dreamed who shaped the suns  
And pillared the blue firmament with light?  
Down all the stretch of hell to the last gulf's shape  
There is no more terrible than this—  
More tongued with censure of the world's blind greed,  
More filled with signs and portents for the soul,  
More fraught with menace to the universe.

How will you ever straighten up this shape?  
Touch it again with immortality;  
Give back the upward looking and the dream;  
Make right the immemorial infamies,  
Perfidious wrongs, immedicable woes?"\*

Now all this is quite away from the manner and spirit of Burns. Such apoplectic eloquence over the sight of a man with a hoe would have been to him quite impossible. For Burns held and sang that the man with the hoe could be just as noble and quite as happy as the man with the scepter. Mr. Markham sings of the supposititious peasant and asks who will give back to him immortality, the "upward looking and the dream." Burns stands forth the real peasant, and says, "lo, here already the immortality, the dream, the vision." Mr. Markham seems to hold that toil can make way for brotherhood only through bitter revolution; Burns with the Christ Gospel sings of brotherhood through toil. This Ayrshire peasant,

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\* "The Man With the Hoe."

## Christ in English Literature

though in his veins burns the fever of a Robespierre, sings not of the flame-colored democracy of France which would degrade the great and strip the world of badges, but of that larger and saner democracy which would teach the toiler that the badge does not count, and that,

“The rank is but the guinea’s stamp,  
A man’s a man for a’ that.”

Here, too, is the preacher of that greatest of all Christian doctrines, charity. This sympathy extended to all living things. The poor brute was not beyond his compassion. He feels for his pet ewe, Mailee, who falls in a ditch where,

“groaning, dying, she did lie,”

and he writes a poem on the unheroic theme; for the mouse whom his plowshare has robbed of a home, his—

“ . . . poor earth-born companion  
And fellow mortal”;

for the poor dumb creatures shivering in the winter storm—

“Listening the doors and winnocks rattle  
I thought me on the ourie cattle.

Ilk happing bird, wee helpless thing  
That in the merry months of Spring  
Delighted me to hear thee sing,

What comes o’ thee?  
Where wilt thou cower thy chattering wing  
An close thy ee?” \*

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\* “A Winter Night.”

## The Literature of Silence

And upon man, the frailest, the most sin-smitten, the most forlorn, he breaks the alabaster box, anointing him with a sweet and gentle pity. We can believe him when he says, "God knows I am no saint, but if I could, and I believe I do it as far as I can, I would wipe the tears from all human eyes." \* True, too, is the ring of the sermon—

"Then gently scan your brother man,  
Still gentler sister woman,  
Tho' they may gang a kennin wrang,  
To step aside is human." †

There has been but one more eloquent preacher of this Gospel since the Master went away—he who wrote, "And now abideth faith, hope, love, but the greatest of these is love."

All this is by no means the recognition of our bard as either moral or Christian. Nor endeavor to gloss over his too apparent faults; it is simply a colorless exposition of the Christian elements that mingle with, alas! much of unsanctified material in the work of Robert Burns.

If in the work of this plowman there is found beneath a surface silence large Christian meanings, even richer will Scott be found in kindred contributions. Though nowhere voicing his belief in the Nazarene, we cannot question the judgment of his son-in-law and most sympathetic critic, Lockhart, that Scott's

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\* "Letters."

† "Address to the Unco Guid."

## Christ in English Literature

"works teach the practical lessons of Christianity." \* As a single example of the multitude that might be given, note the flowering of Christian graces in that greatest female character ever limned outside of Shakespeare, Jeanie Deans. † This honest, straightforward, plain-faced, great-hearted peasant girl draws us with resistless power, and the sole magnet is Christian goodness. This character at least in its first unfoldings draws no color from its surroundings.

The life is the hard, rigorous, unlighted, unadorned life of the Scotch peasant. Scotia's skies are over her, it is true, and around her the bloom of the heather and the purple of the hills, but these beauties are shut out by the thickness and opaqueness of Jeanie's domestic life. Acquainted with butter-making, and knowing well how to keep the kitchen sweet and clean, she has little leisure for the culture that comes through close communion with Nature in her poetic garb. Nor is hers the charm of elegance and gracious speech. She is a barefoot Maud Muller without Maud's winsome ways. And yet Scott has made this plain-faced girl a heroine! Not only have we here a heroine with an unromantic environment and an unattractive person, but this

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\* "Life of Sir Walter Scott," Vol. 6, p. 23.

† "The Heart of Midlothian."

## The Literature of Silence

unpoetical girl is brought into sharp contrast with the beauty and the piquancy of her erring sister, Effie.

Yet Jeanie is ever the center of interest, never does her face fade from the story, and to the very close of the tragic story it is about *her* we are most concerned. How comes this? What is this miracle being wrought? In its essence simple, the miracle of goodness. In Jeanie Deans, Scott has incarnated all Christian graces, sympathy, affection, sacrifice, fidelity to the right, and it is the tragic persistence of these qualities in the broadening circles and profounder reaches of the development of this character through the humiliation and terror of Effie's shame that wins the beholder, inspiring an ever-deepening interest in her fate. Never, perhaps, was the supreme fascination of goodness more splendidly shown than in the famous trial scene when Jeanie, flung into a world of storm, holds unwaveringly to the right.

It is the greatest trial scene in all fiction. Effie Deans is before the Scotch court on trial for the murder of her babe. Though she has declared her innocence, and in response to the question of the judge, "Guilty or not guilty?" has cried, "Not guilty, not guilty. Oh, how could I have killed my bairn!" though her youth, her beauty, her grief, have been her

## Christ in English Literature

allies, the evidence against her is strong and convincing. A witness must be found who will testify on a critical moot point. Jeanie Deans is called as this witness. Into the awful impressiveness and dread solemnity of the court comes the simple-hearted girl. Shall she bend from the straight way of truth and save a life, or, treading that narrow way, bring her sister to a shameful death? Everything pleads for Effie. Judge and counsel look to her with tense expectancy for the saving word. Her own heart pleads for the prisoner, and all the memories of happy childhood days. Even her father, shaken out of his statuesque despair by the entrance of Jeanie, the muscles of his face working visibly, his hands clutching his stick for support, pleads mutely, yet powerfully, for the erring girl, while Effie, wildly throwing her arms around her sister's neck, cries out in very terror, "Oh, save me, Jeanie, save me!" Was ever test so severe? All voices pleading with her to speak the saving word—all save that of conscience, of duty, of God. She recalls the oath, how she had sworn "the truth to tell, naught to conceal," as she should stand before the great judgment bar. For a moment she hesitates. But the right wins, and knowing what it means—the calling down of the living thunderbolts of God, sorrow, shame and the desolation of death—in a voice shaken by sobs

## The Literature of Silence

and sadder than the sighing of the sea, she speaks the word that seals her sister's doom.

Was ever fidelity to the right more cruelly tested and more palpitant with strange fascinations? Who could have painted such a scene? None save one who had looked upon that solitary Man on the Mountain of Temptation and in Pilate's hall, in his heroic resistance to the sin that would master, and whose soul had been filled with the awful beauty of the Vision. Strong and inspiring are these involuntary exhibitions of the mastership of Jesus of Nazareth over these greatest of Scotland's great sons.



VOICES OF REVOLT

"There are, as in philosophy, so in divinity, sturdy doubts and boisterous objections, wherewith the unhappiness of our knowledge too nearly acquaints us. More of these no man hath known than myself, which I confess I conquered, not in a martial posture, but on my knees."—*Religio Medici* (*Sir Thomas Browne*), p. 42.

"We live within the shadow of a veil that no man's hand can lift. Some are born near it, as it were, and pass their lives striving to peer through its web, catching now and again visions of inexplicable things; but some of us live so far from the veil that we not only deny its existence, but delight in mocking those that perceive what we cannot."—*Introduction to Works of Maurice Maeterlinck*, by *Laurence Alma-Tadema*, p. 8.

#### IV.

#### VOICES OF REVOLT.

THERE is a slight though scintillant literature that breathes only hostility to the Christ and open defiance. Its doubt is not hushed but trumpet-tongued. Its infidelity is its glory not its shame. It is not content with secret underminings of the Truth, but flames out in open revolt and from the housetops shrieks its unbelief. Against all creeds and dogmas and systems of religion it sets itself. Christianity, to its distempered vision, blocks the way of progress and the world's onward movement is over its discredited dust. In its denunciations it grows hysterical and in wildest unreason, with Prof. Clifford, calls Christianity "that awful plague which has destroyed two civilizations and but barely failed to slay such promise of good as is now struggling to live among men—a system which has made its red mark on history and still threatens mankind."

Leader of this red-hatted, sansculottic host is Percy Bysshe Shelley. Shelley was a born agitator. The fever of revolution burned in his veins. Beneath the red roses of his verse lurked riot, and battles slept in his lyre. Rarely cultured, gifted, shy, stung to madness

## Christ in English Literature

while but a boy by the sense of world-injustice, and deeply sympathizing with all earth's helpless, seeing too, with those far-seeing eyes the hypocrisy and emptiness of much of the religion of his day, banned as atheist already at Eton, his boyish spirit flames out in impassioned revolt against the existing order. This iconoclasm fairly glows in the pages of "Queen Mab." Coming at first under the spell of Newman in terrific rebound he lands in unstarred atheism. To Shelley nothing was final and closed. Says one of his biographers, Mr. Symonds, "It was a fundamental point with him to regard all questions however sifted and settled by the wise of former ages as still open; and in his inordinate thirst for liberty he rejoiced to be the Deicide of a pernicious theological delusion. In other words, he passed at Oxford by one leap from a state of indifference with regard to Christianity into an attitude of vehement antagonism." \* However questionable the taste of Mr. Symonds in thus declaring Christianity "a pernicious theological delusion," of which his literary idol was the self-appointed "Deicide," it is a matter of history that from this time Shelley was an avowed antagonist of the Faith, and that against the religion of his day he threw himself with pas-

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\* "Life of Shelley," p. 8.

## Voices of Revolt

sionate and indignant protest. The God of the churches was to Shelley's mind but an Almighty fiend—

“Whose mercy is a nickname for the rage  
Of tameless tigers hungering for blood.”

To this tyrant Prometheus in “Prometheus Unbound” bids bold defiance in the very mood of Shelley's hate—

“Fiend, I defy thee! with a calm, fixed mind  
All that thou canst inflict I bid thee do.”

This tyrant may send disease, hail, frost and fire and plague, yet—

“I curse thee; let a sufferer's curse  
Clasp thee his torturer like remorse!  
Till thine infinity shall be  
A robe of envomed agony,  
And thine Omnipotence a crown of pain  
To cling like burning gold round thy dissolving brain.”\*

This is his fixed mood. Whether Shelley believed Christ to be a myth or an impostor is not quite clear, but he held that “the delusions of Christianity are ever fatal to genius.” How, then, Leigh Hunt could call Shelley a Christian is not quite clear. Equally remarkable is the deliverance of the poet's most brilliant expositor, Mr. Symonds, “It is certain that as Christianity passes beyond its medieval phase and casts aside the husks of outworn dogmas, it will more and more approximate to Shelley's exposition”; and that “for those who would

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\* “Prometheus Unbound.”

## Christ in English Literature

neither on the one hand relinquish what is permanent in religion nor yet on the other deny the inevitable conclusions of modern thought, his teaching is indubitably valuable."\* For whatever else he might be, Shelley certainly was no Christian.

One is curious to know of the new temple this boyish revolutionist will raise upon the ruins of the old. A faith of some kind, we are informed, he had, in liberty, in equality, in the perfectibility of a universe governed by law and love, in the beauty that is divine, in "the Omnipotent soul whereof all our souls are atoms"—a faith formless, indefinite, mystical, melting, shifting, as the confused phantasmagoria of a dream. If we may follow the poet at all, the lines of his thinking, or rather his dreaming, ran somewhat as follows: He conceived of the universe not as mechanical or dead, but a living thing penetrated by what he termed the Spirit of Beauty, of Nature, of Love. To this Spirit there is an answering and accordant spirit in the heart of man. Now, man is burdened, sorrow-laden and cast down, and his deliverance is in his emancipation from the superstitions of religion and his union with this Spirit of Beauty. None other were ever so fit as he to chant this Beauty. He had prayed—

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\* "Life of Shelley," p. 33.

## Voices of Revolt

“Mother of this unfathomable world!  
Favour my solemn song, for I have loved  
Thee ever and thee only; . . . . .  
. . . . .

And though ne’er yet  
Thou hast unveiled thy inmost sanctuary,  
Enough from incommunicable dream,  
And twilight phantasms and deep noonday thought  
Has shone within me that serenely now  
And moveless as a long-forgotten lyre  
Suspended in the solitary dome  
Of some mysterious and deserted fane,  
I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain  
May modulate with murmurs of the air  
And motions of the forests and the sea,  
And voices of living beings and woven hymns  
Of night and day, and the deep heart of man.”\*

And the prayer seemed answered, for his words are music, a music haunting, stealing upon the senses with a bliss that is almost pain. But though there is melody there is no clearness of utterance, and to the very last we wonder if we have mastered the secrets of the poet’s faith, if indeed, save as some witching fantasy, it came to Shelley’s own brain. His “Prometheus Unbound” is possibly his most intelligible contribution to our understanding of his religion. Here he has taken the old Æschylian myth of Prometheus bound to the rock by irate Jove, whom he had disobeyed, and has rewrought it to suit his will. Prometheus is here the representative of humanity, pure, noble, the slave of tyranny,

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\* “Alastor.”

## Christ in English Literature

doomed to suffer, tied to the rock of the eagle-baffling mountain, crying—

“The crawling glaciers pierce me with the spears  
Of their moon-freezing crystals; the bright chains  
Eat with their burning cold into my veins;  
Heaven’s winged hound, polluting from thy lips  
His beak in poison not his own, tears up  
My heart; and shapeless sights come wandering by,  
The ghastly people of the realm of dream,  
Mocking me; and the earthquake-fiends are charged  
To wrench the rivets from my quivering wounds  
When the rocks split and close again behind.

. . . . .  
Ah me! alas! pain, pain, ever, forever.”\*

Touched by this great pain—

“The voices of the earth cried out in anguish,  
The tongueless corners of the craggy hills  
Cried, ‘Misery!’ and the ocean’s purple waves  
Climbing the land howled to the lashing winds,  
And the pale nations heard it, ‘Misery!’ ”

Thus does humanity suffer at the hands of superstition. Now this God, this religion that so curses the world, is but the creature of man’s brain. Superstition was earth-created. Prometheus dowered Jove with what he had—

“I gave all  
He has; and in return he chains me here,  
Years, ages, night and day; whether the sun  
Split my parched skin, or in the moony night  
The crystal-winged snow clings round my hair;  
While my beloved race is hampered down  
By his thought-executing ministers.”†

Thus is humanity cursed by a religion of its own creation. But deliverance is at hand.

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\* “Prometheus Unbound.”

† “Prometheus Unbound.”

## Voices of Revolt

Asia, the Spirit of Love, of Beauty, is awakened from a dream and by mystic summons brought to the rescue of the suffering god.

Asia is an enchantment, and to look upon her in her loveliness is to be—

“Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing.”

There is witchery in her song—

“My soul is an enchanted boat  
Which like a sleeping swan doth float  
Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing,  
And thine doth like an angel sit  
Beside the helm conducting it,  
Whilst all the winds with melody are ringing.  
It seems to float ever, for ever  
Upon that merry winding river  
Between mountains, woods, abysses,  
A paradise of wildernesses!  
Till like one in slumber bound,  
Borne to the ocean I float down, around,  
Into a sea profound of ever spreading sound.

“Meanwhile thy Spirit lifts its pinions,  
In music’s most serene dominions,  
Catching the winds that fan that happy heaven.  
And we sail on, away, afar,  
Without a course, without a star,  
But by the instinct of sweet music driven,  
Till through Elysian garden islets  
By the most beautiful of pilots,  
Where never mortal pinnacle glided  
The boat of my desire is guided.”\*

Nothing could be more exquisite. And so by “the instinct of sweet music driven,” Asia comes to Prometheus and saves him. Thus through the Spirit of Beauty is man, the thrall

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\* “Prometheus Unbound.”

## Christ in English Literature

of superstition, to be delivered. Then glad days come. Then the new earth with its freedom from "thrones, altars, judgment-seats, prisons, scepters, tiaras, swords and chains," from custom's "evil taint," from jealousy, envy and ill shame and all the bitter drops that spoil "the sweet taste of the nepenthe, love."

The Paradise thus conjured up is an attractive one, but not more real than the slumbrous cave into which Prometheus, after his release, retreats with Asia and all her spirit train. What has this poem taught us? Nothing. As shadowy as before seems this Religion of Beauty. Not even the one hundred pages of the "Prometheus Unbound" can give it definiteness. What a sad commentary upon the infirmity of genius that Shelley should have ever thought that this dream was endowed with the potency of life; that *he* had conquered the Nazarene; that the religion of the Son of Man should perish from the earth, and that his own ill-knit fantasies should survive the shocks of time! Yet so in folly did he sing. Christ should be without a worshiper and his altars overturned, but immortality and glory for the flitting shadows of the poet's dreams!

"Yes, when the sweeping storm of time  
Has sung its death-dirge over the ruined fanes  
And broken altars of the Almighty fiend  
Whose name usurps thy honors, and the blood

## Voices of Revolt

Through centuries clotted there has floated down  
The tainted flood of ages, shalt thou live  
Unchangeable."\*

Close akin to Shelley, both intellectually and spiritually, is Byron. Both are revolutionists. Both are consumed by that fever of French madness which brought a nation to anarchy in the sacred name of Liberty. Both are filled with a vague unrest. Both are children of the storm. Both are fighters roused by war's alarums to tumultuous life, and sniff with joy the carnage of the battle. Both expatriated, outlawed, wandering, are driven through stormy and eventful days to tragic and unlooked-for death. Both—no matter with what strange inconsistency of mood and life—brood with deepest heart's concern over the grave spiritual problems that are ever pressing for solution on the souls of men.

For Byron was something more than a libertine correctly mirrored only in Don Juan. His is the somber genius that with fateful Œdipus steps would fare ever forward to wrest life's secrets from the eternal sphinx, though his pathway be gloomed with horror, and the end a tragedy. And it is this seriousness that keeps Byron alive, not his voluptuousness nor his music. If there be aught of truth in Mr. Henley's contention that Byron is "the only

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\* "Prometheus Unbound."

## Christ in English Literature

English poet bard since Milton to live a master influence in the world at large," be sure that the secret of this immortality is not to be looked for in the sensuous tintings of his Childe Harold and Haidees, in the color of his words and the tricks of rhyme, but in the virility and power of a brain peering with hot and inquisitive eyes into the very deeps of destiny.

Shelley had not Byron's strength of mental grasp, nor had Byron the aerial lightness of imagination and delicacy of dreaming of the ethereal Shelley, but they have kinship in their unwearied though futile effort to probe the mysteries of life, to find new and more satisfactory adjustments of man to the Eternal Order, to call into being out of the chaos of political, social and religious conventions a new world where inclination should be accordant with law.

They failed in giving us new meanings, but they have given us a new pathos, and heart-breaking refrains. Byron's revolt from the church was primarily temperamental. He was born behind the barricades. His first articulate song words were, "I am of the Opposition." And this opposition was all-inclusive. Against the literary cults and canons of his day he threw himself in his first work of moment in full-panoplied defiance. Southey, Coleridge, Wordsworth, all notable contemporaries, are but

## Voices of Revolt

"The spurious brood,  
The race who rhyme from folly or for food."

He was against the established political order. "The king-times," he writes, "are fast finishing. There will be blood shed like water and tears like mist; but the people will conquer in the end. I shall not live to see it, but I foresee it."\* He was against the social order. He railed against English conventions and English ethics. His marital infelicity was rather an excuse than a cause for his hegira to Italy with its freer manners and its public opinion less inquisitive and less stern. It is not to be wondered at, then, that this revolt should extend to the church. Was not the church a part of the established order of things? Were not priests law-makers and did not the Temple lend its glory to the throne? Then the church must go. The poet was wont to attribute his break with the church to his enforced attendance upon its services when a boy, and to what he termed the awful repulsiveness of Calvinism; but it is quite obvious that Byron could never have been in sympathy with the doctrines of the Christ. Christianity inculcates the spirit of forgiveness, Byron was a "good hater"; Christianity asks for moral whiteness, Byron was licentious; Christianity enjoins meekness, Byron's was the pride of

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\* "Letters."

## Christ in English Literature

Lucifer; Christianity is democratic, Byron was an aristocrat, his song democracy, but theoretical and Utopian; Christianity is optimistic, Byron's songs are night songs and he was dissatisfied with Thorwaldsen's bust of himself because it did not look miserable enough; Christianity reveals immortality, Byron petulantly exclaims, "I will have nothing to do with your immortality, it is enough of misery to live out our lives here"; Christianity is social, Byron lives apart—

"From my youth upwards  
My spirit walked not with the souls of men:  
My joys, my griefs, my passions and my powers  
Made me a stranger; though I wore the form  
I had no sympathy with breathing flesh." \*

Christianity, too, calls for self-effacement, while Byron is frankly colossal in his egotisms, projecting himself into all his works, so that, whether it be the soft-faced, sybaritic Don Juan, the melodramatic and storm-lashed Lara, the world-spurning, gloom-coronated Manfred, or that strange blend of pilgrim, misanthrope and troubadour, Childe Harold, you need not be told that here is but one of the parts of George Gordon Byron; and the poet, not abashed, cries, "It is so very like."

Obviously between such a soul and the Christian religion there could be but slight affinity.

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\* "Childe Harold."

## Voices of Revolt

Of necessity there could be only estrangement and enmity. It is true that at times he became skeptical of his skepticism, as when he writes, "I deny nothing, I doubt everything," and when in a footnote to Don Juan he says, "If ever man was God or God man, he was both; I have never arraigned his creed, but the abuse of it," or when in yet more serious way in a letter to Clifford he affirms that infidelity is "after all, I believe, a disease of the mind as much as other kinds of hypochondria." These, though, are but passing moods tempering little the harshness of his work which, in the main drifts of it, is revolutionary, destructive, indiscriminate in its iconoclasms, missing all fine distinctions, confounding the church and Christianity, a confusing theology and the Unseen Lord.

Did the revolt prosper? Did it bring peace? Nay, its harvest was the thorns and briers of a diseased will, a tortured conscience, a gnawing remorse. The abbot's lament over Manfred is the summing up of this waywardness.

"This should have been a noble creature; he  
Hath all the energy which would have made  
A goodly frame of glorious elements  
Had they been wisely mingled; as it is,  
It is an awful chaos—light and darkness—  
And mind and dust—and passions and pure thoughts,  
Mixed and contending without end or order,  
All dominant or destructive."

Appalled and horrified by this wreck of life,

## - Christ in English Literature

do we seek the cause—the forces that hastened on such hideous ruin? Taine finds it without. “He like everything else is a product, and as such it is right he should be what he is. His innate imperfection is in order like the constant abortion of a stamen in a plant, like the fundamental irregularity of four facets in a crystal. What we took for a deformity is a form; what seemed to us a subversion of a law is the accomplishment of a law.”\* But such physiological explanations seem shallow. It was not the resistless force without but the unbridled force within; not the imperative of environment but the aberration of will, the shipwreck of faith, the devastation of unbelief, that wrought such boundless havoc. To French critics who deified heredity and environment, Byron could say, once more in the words of Manfred—

“I have not been thy judge, nor am thy prey—  
But was my own destroyer and will be  
My own hereafter. Back, ye baffled fiends!  
The hand of death is on me—but not yours.”

And so he died of being Byron self-slaughtered and defiant. Let these two, Byron and Shelley, beautiful, but with the beauty that is not of heaven, angels, but not of the morning, pain-marred and appealing, wearing the thorn-crown of their own plaiting, and yet splendid with all the magnificence of Milton's fallen spirits,

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\* “History of English Literature,” Vol. IV., p. 68.

## Voices of Revolt

stand for the literature of revolt—a literature whose minor greets us in the dashing dogmata of Prof. Tyndall, the mocking laughter of Olive Schreiner, the wild and bitter cries of Edgar Saltus, the mordant, pain-flung music of William Henley—a literature bold, bald, brutal ofttimes, yet defiant, blowing through twisted bugles the notes of a challenging scorn.



**IL PENSEROSO**

"Hush . . . Hush! . . . We must speak in whispers now—we must trouble her no more. . . . The human soul is very silent. . . . The human soul likes to slip away in solitude. . . . It suffers so timidly. . . . But the sadness, Golaud . . . but the sadness of all that one sees! Oh! Oh! Oh!"—*Pelleas & Melisanda (Masterlinck) Act V., Sc. 2.*

"Child! child! no more! The coursers of time, lashed as it were by invisible spirits, hang on the light car of our destiny; and all that we can do is in cool self-possession to hold the reins with a firm hand, . . . whither it is hurrying, who can tell?"—*Goethe's Autobiography, Vol. II., p. 331.*

"The idea of Jesus is the illumination and the inspiration of existence. Without it moral life becomes a barren expediency and social life a hollow shell and emotional life an idle play or stupid drudgery. Without it the world is a puzzle and death a horror and eternity a blank. More and more it shines, the only hope of what without it is all darkness. More and more the wild, sad, frightened cries of men who believe nothing, and the calm, earnest prayers of men who believe so much that they long for perfect faith, seem to blend into the great appeal which Philip of Bethsaida made to Jesus, 'Lord, show us the Father.'"—*The Influence of Jesus (Phillips Brooks), p. 273.*

## V.

### IL PENSEROSO.

MINGLING with the Voices of Revolt are other voices, gentler, softer, sad, plaintive with the plaint of a world-consuming sorrow. This literature, too, is unbelieving, but its voice is choked with sobs. Unlike the speech of rebels it breathes forth no hostility to the Christ and his church but is touched with an indefinable sorrow over the surrender of a faith that is precious. It has seen the Christ and felt the quickening impulse of that pure and aspiring beauty, yet it dare not trust itself to the power of the Vision; dare not yield in sweet abandon to the tenderness of that dream. Its contributors, while differing in much else, find oneness in a common sorrow over a loss irreparable. Their deep and idealizing sadness almost recreates the Christ whom they have laid in the grave, and once again in the Temple they are found united, building up through love and dreams the altars overturned, and before a spectral though not unlovely Christ kneeling in the worship of sorrow.

One of these worshipers is James Anthony Froude. This brilliant Professor of History is a thoroughgoing skeptic. To Froude's mind

## Christ in English Literature

Protestantism sounded the death knell of Christianity. For Protestantism is a plea for freedom of thought and speech, and before searching investigation and rigorous scientific tests he fancied Christianity could not stand. Free thought is but the synonym of unbelief. Catholicism, with its "beautiful creed that for 1500 years tuned the heart and formed the noblest of mankind," \* is passing, and Protestantism, usurping its place, is illogical and therefore temporary. For Protestantism is the virtual denial of the supernatural. In the vigorous repudiation of medieval Catholic legends by the Reformers, our critic sees only the paving of the way to the denial of all miracles, for from a disbelief in miracles wrought by tombs of saints to disbelief in miracles wrought by hands of Christ, the thinker is bound to go. "On human evidence," he says, "the miracles of St. Teresa and St. Francis of Assisi are as well established as those of the New Testament." † In his vocabulary, therefore, Rationalism is infidelity. And yet how wistfully he looks Christward. He quotes approvingly the opinion of Goethe that the human race can never attain to anything higher than Christianity if by Christianity is meant the religion which

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\* "Short Studies on Great Subjects," Vol. I., p. 164.

† *Ib.* p 189.

## II Penseroso

was revealed to the world in the teaching and the life of its Founder, but cannot find a place in his heart for this mighty credo. There is nothing of bitterness, nothing of denial, only agonizing inability to see and know. He has no taste for polemics, only a cry for light. "It is not the object of this paper," he writes in his essay on "A Plea for the Free Discussion of Theological Difficulties," "to put forward either this or that particular opinion. The writer is conscious only that he is passing fast towards the dark gate which soon will close behind him. He believes that some kind of sincere and firm conviction on these things is of infinite moment to him, and entirely diffident of his own power to find his way toward such a conviction, he is both ready and anxious to disclaim 'all right to private judgment' in the matter. He wishes only to learn from those who are able to teach him." \* But none seem able to teach him. In his autobiographical story we see with what pangs he has parted from his treasure. "God is my witness, nothing which I ever believed has parted from me, but it has been torn up by the roots bleeding out of my heart. Why, why are we compelled to know anything when each step gained in knowledge is but one more nerve summoned out into the consciousness of pain?

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\* "Short Studies on Great Subjects," Vol. I., p. 179.

## Christ in English Literature

Oh, that tree of knowledge, that death in life! . . . Woe to the unlucky man who as a child is taught even as a portion of his creed what his grown reason must forswear. Faith endures no barking of the surface; it is a fair, delicate plant transplanted out of Paradise into an alien garden, where surest care alone can foster it. But wound the tenderest shoot—but break away one single flower, and though it linger on for years, feeding upon stimulants and struggling through ■ languishing vitality, it has received its death blow; the blighted juices fly trembling back into the heart, nevermore to venture out again.” \*

With what inexpressible sadness does he view the wreck of his one time faith. “I would gladly give away all I am and all I ever may become, all the years, every one of them which may be given me to live, but for one week of my old child’s faith, to go back to calm and peace again and then to die in hope. Oh, for one look of the blue sky as it looked then when we called it heaven!” †

This passionate lament is echoed by that brilliant young Rugbean, that nineteenth century Hamlet, as Thos. Arnold calls him, Arthur Hugh Clough. In early life an ardent apostle of the broad church views of Arnold, he is brought at Oxford under the spell of Newman,

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\* “Nemesis of Faith,” p. 76.

† Ib. p. 33.

## II Penseroso

and yields himself almost wholly to the splendid fascination of Newman's genius. Though the way led to Rome Clough, seems powerless to resist. He was "like a straw drawn up by the draught of the chimney." But the inevitable reaction came; he is cut loose by his restless intellect from his anchorage in the quiet waters of the surrender to authority, drifts out to sea, is caught in the maelstrom of the new science, and though partly released therefrom, never finds a port. His faith is gone and he finds himself at last, after agonized debates and sinkings of heart, in the dreary world of the agnostic, utterly unable to resist the paralyzing doubt that creeps in upon his soul. Clough was honest, desperately honest; he would know and hold only the truth—

"But play no tricks upon thy soul, O man;  
Let fact be fact, and life the thing it can."

This beautiful fidelity to fact through perversest twist of reasoning and disordered dream led him to reject historical Christianity. "I certainly am free," he writes, "to tell you that while I freely think that the Christian religion is the best or, possibly, the only really good religion that has appeared, on the other hand, as to how it appeared, I see all possible doubt. . . . If the facts are to be believed it is simply on trust." \*

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\* "Prose Remains," p. 117.

## Christ in English Literature

About even the basic truths of Christianity he is in doubt. "Whether Christ died upon the cross I cannot tell, yet I am prepared to find some spiritual truth in the Atonement." \* Alas, Clough can never tell; always is he wavering, the Dipsychus—the Double-minded—of his own dreams.

Yet this ignorance, he thinks, is of little hurt. The fact is, perhaps, inconsequential. "I cannot feel sure," he writes, "that a man may not have all that is important in Christianity even if he does not so much as know that Jesus of Nazareth existed." † Not belief in Jesus, then, he holds, is important, but belief in the spirit of Jesus, in faith and mercy and love, in the revelation through conscience and the answer to human longings. Even as to the primacy of the things of the spirit he is sometimes in doubt and the voices of materialism, voices he cannot shut out, jar upon his soul with all the importunacy and hatefulness of unlovely and unwelcome truth. His mental journeyings lead him only into dismal worlds, and he turns savagely upon such quests—

"Hang this thinking, at last! What good is it?

Oh, and what evil!

Oh, what mischief and pain like a clock in a sick man's chamber!"

This doubt that comes through thinking, this

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\* "Prose Remains," p. 45.

† *Ib.* p. 115.

## II Penseroso

clock in the sick man's chamber, he does not glory in it, but with all his shrinking, beautiful soul he loathes it and wishes it were not. For thus to him is the world shadowed. Life is perplexity, pain and a torturing unrest. Would it not be better to sleep?

"Would that I could wish my wishes all to rest."

In such a Nirvana only is there rest. Clough is unbelieving, but his skepticism gives him only a numbing pain. A wail of infinite sorrow sounds through his verse. Listen to his song—

"Christ is not risen, no—  
He lies and moulders low.  
Christ is not risen!  
What though the stone were rolled away and though  
The grave found empty there?  
Is he not risen and shall we not rise?  
Oh we unwise!  
What did we dream, what wake we to discover?  
Ye hills fall on us and ye mountains cover!  
In darkness and great gloom  
Come, ere we thought, it is our day of doom;  
From the cursed world which is our tomb  
Christ is not risen.

"Eat, drink, and die for we are souls bereaved;  
Of all the creatures under heaven's wide cope  
We are most hopeless who had once most hope,  
And most beliefless who had once believed—  
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,  
As of the unjust so also of the just—  
Yea, of that Just One, too!  
It is the one sad Gospel that is true,  
Christ is not risen."\*

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\* "Easter Day."

## Christ in English Literature

But even here is the voice of Dipsychus. He cannot so bury his faith. The stone is rolled against the door, but forth from the shut-in tomb comes the spirit of Jesus, the faith in faith, the love of love, and through these cometh salvation. This is the torture of Clough. He can never come either to faith or to denial. "I believe in Providence partly," and in everything else he believes "partly." He cannot have faith in his doubts, yet he must ever doubt his faith. Life is an enigma—

"Oh, may we for assurance' sake,  
Some arbitrary judgment take,  
And wilfully pronounce it clear,  
For this or that 'tis we are here?"

No answer comes, the riddle remains and the sadness. At times the clouds momentarily lift, as when he writes, "Are you not aware that life is like a railway? One gets into deep cuttings and long, dark tunnels where one sees nothing. . . . Go straight on, however, and one is sure to come out into a new country on the other side, the hills sunny and bright";\* as when he sings—

"Go with the sun and the stars and yet evermore in thy spirit  
Say to thyself: It is good; yet is there better than it.  
This that I see is not all, and this that I do is but little,  
Nevertheless it is good, though there is better than it";†

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\* "Prose Remains," p. 204.

† "Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich."

## II Penseroso

and yet again more triumphantly and heart-  
somerly—

“Say not the struggle naught availeth,  
The labour and the wounds are vain,  
The enemy faints not nor faileth,  
And as things have been they remain.

“If hopes were dupes fears may be liars,  
It may be in yon smoke concealed,  
Your comrades chased e’en now the fliers  
And but for you possess the field.

“For while the tired waves vainly breaking  
Seem here no painful inch to gain,  
Far back through creeks and inlets making  
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.”

But the mood soon changes. Gone is the singer's hope and his daring, and once yet again his music sinks into the plaintive minor with its wild, inarticulate longings, its sobbings and its cries, once more gather the mourners around the tomb from which the bright angels of the resurrection have been driven away; once more the boundless pathos of the refrain—

“He is not risen.”

Differing but little from Clough, save perhaps in a somewhat wider range of knowledge and in classical perfection of form, is the noted apostle of sweetness and light, Mr. Matthew Arnold. This “finical Oxonian's” creed, through charming essays and through its popularization in that well-nigh forgotten book, “Robert Elsmere,” the work of Arnold's niece, Mrs. Ward, has come to wide notice. Mr.

## Christ in English Literature

Arnold, like Clough, rejects historical Christianity. His rejection is radical and final. This critic, though sure of nothing else, seems—however blatant the contradiction—to be quite sure of himself. And so he takes the Bible, for which he professes the greatest respect, and with which, it must be admitted, he shows a facile familiarity, a book suffering greatly through the incumbrances of the Aberglaube, the extra beliefs of the generations, and, relieving it from these incumbrances, brings it in an altogether new light before the world! For this we should be grateful. But the Aberglaube—the extra belief—is, alas! not a surface Aberglaube, it is wrought into the very texture of the book. It is not only the curse without but the curse within from which Mr. Arnold is to save us, not only the false interpretation but the false content. Hence this quite confident Englishman proceeds to the expurgation and evisceration of the Bible with the result at least of making the book much smaller. From this expurgated book miracles—all outcroppings of supernaturalism—have been banished quite. “Miracles, the mainstay of popular religion, are touched by Ithuriel’s spear. They are beginning to dissolve.”\* Mr. Arnold is the Ithuriel. There was no miracle of incarnation and Virgin birth. This was but

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\* “Literature and Dogma,” p. 307.

## II Penseroso

a pious dream. There was no miracle of resurrection. "Jesus had said, 'If a man keep my word he shall never see death.' And by a kind of short cut to the conclusion thus laid down, Christians constructed their fairy tale of the second advent, the resurrection of the body, the new Jerusalem." So apt were Christians in taking these "short cuts" and constructing their "fairy tales" that there is little of historic credibility in the narratives the religious world is wont to think inspired. Yet in the grain from which with such great labor our critics have winnowed the chaff, there is held to be the potency of life. "Christianity is a real source of cure for a real bondage and misery."\* "It is the greatest and happiest stroke ever yet made for human happiness and perfection."† And while historical Christianity will be discarded, while the supernatural shall be altogether eliminated from the Christ story, while miracles will be no longer credible—consequently the necessary rejection of the Virgin birth and the inevitable conclusion that Jesus was but the natural son of Joseph and Mary—still Christianity, this emasculated, featureless, unreal thing, will remain "as the indispensable background, the three-fourths of life"!‡

In Mr. Arnold's scheme Jesus is not the rev-

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\* "Literature and Dogma," p. 43.

† "Mixed Essays," p. 44.

‡ "Literature and Dogma," p. 45.

## Christ in English Literature

elation of God, for in a personal, living, loving God he could not bring himself to believe, feeling only "a Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness," but a spiritual genius whose chief mission it was to wake in man the poetical, the mystical, which is to say, the spiritual. Jesus came not to interpret God but to "restore the intuition." His was no Gospel of deliverance, only spiritual insight. Yet there was effectualness in his work. Mr. Arnold dreams of world perfection, and to this cosmic upland of the spirit he said the Nazarene helped to lift through the revelation of his "secret." This "secret of Jesus" the critic quite lengthily and somewhat academically expounds. It is not the Gospel of renunciation. This Gospel, it is true, was taught, "Whosoever will come unto me let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me." But therein was not the "secret." Plato had taught renunciation even to the comfort-loving and cynical Horace. The maxim but "contained" the secret of Jesus, and that secret was that renunciation *is the way to happiness*. "For the breaking the sway of what is commonly called oneself, ceasing our concern with it and leaving it not to perish, is not, Jesus said, being thwarted or crossed, but *living*. And the proof of this is that it has the character of life in the highest degree—the power

## II Penseroso

of going right, hitting the mark, succeeding. That is, it has the character of *happiness*, and happiness is for Israel, the same thing as having the Eternal with us, seeing the salvation of God." \* As Israel, therefore, is the people of righteousness, because though others have perceived the importance of righteousness, Israel, above every one, perceived the *happiness* of it; so self renouncement, the main factor in conduct or righteousness, is "the secret of Jesus" because, although others have seen that it was necessary, Jesus above every one saw that it was *peace, joy, life*. This is the secret and this is the title of Jesus to immortality. The one time view of the Messiahship of Jesus can no longer obtain. Once he lived, the Jesus of the Gospel idylls, but even then only in the too credulous faith of his followers—

"That Gracious Child, that thorn-crowned Man!  
He lived while we believed.

"While we believed on earth he went  
And open stood his grave.  
Men called from chamber, church and tent,  
And Christ was by to save." †

Now he lives not even in our belief—

"Now he is dead! Far hence he lies  
In the lone Syrian town,  
And on his grave with shining eyes  
The Syrian stars look down."

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\* "Literature and Dogma," p. 203.

† "Obermann."

## Christ in English Literature

In the pathos of these lines echoes once again Clough's "Easter Day" and the sadness of "He is not risen."

This Gospel of denial flings its shadow across all the poet's words, and through all his verbal harmonies runs the accent of "immedicable pain." He turns to nature, but it only gives back his sorrow—

"Hark! at the nightingale!  
The tawny throated!  
Hark from that moon-lit cedar what a burst!  
What triumph! hark—what pain!  
. . . . .  
Listen, Eugenia—  
How thick the bursts come crowding through the leaves!  
Again—thou hearest?  
Eternal Passion!  
Eternal Pain!"

He shuts himself up with the past, but that past is—

"Tinged with the infinite desire  
For all that might have been" ;

he fronts the future, and though Hope may catch a glimpse of brightness trembling along the east line, yet—

"While we wait allow our tears."

He looks out upon his fellows, but the prospect appalls—

"For most men in a brazen prison live,  
Where in the sun's hot eye,  
With heads bent o'er their toil, they languidly  
Their lives to some unmeaning task-work give,  
Dreaming of naught beyond their prison wall.

## II Penseroso

And as year after year,  
Fresh products of their barren labor fall  
From their tired hands, and rest  
Never yet comes more near,  
Gloom settles down over their breast;  
And while they try to stem  
The waves of mournful thought by which they are prest,  
Death in their prison reaches them  
Unfreed, having seen nothing, still unblest." \*

This is the fate of all. For a moment the  
curse may lift; yet only for a moment, and  
then with the inexorableness of fate it presses  
upon its own—

"Joy comes and goes, hope ebbs and flows  
Like the wave,  
Change doth untwist the tranquil strength of men,  
Love lends life a little grace,  
A few sad smiles; and then  
Both are laid in one cold place,  
In the grave.

"Dreams dawn and fly, friends smile and die  
Like spring flowers;  
Our vaunted life is one long funeral.  
Men dig graves with bitter tears  
For their dead hopes; and all,  
Mazed with doubts and sick with fears,  
Count the hours." †

Classical in form, rhythmical and melodious,  
subtly introspective, trustworthy in its por-  
trayal of the conflict of a soul torn asunder by  
conflicting forces, nevertheless this poetry has  
no *lift* to it, but sings ever heartbrokenly of  
loss. Christianity is no more—

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\* "The Scholar-Gypsy."

† "The Youth of Nature."

## Christ in English Literature

"The sea of Faith  
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore  
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled,  
And now I only hear  
The melancholy long-withdrawing roar,  
Retreating to the breath  
Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear  
And naked shingles of the world." \*

With this faith goes all the joy of human life  
and the world is flat and dull—

"Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another, for the world which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain." †

Nowhere is there consolation, for through all  
things—

"There sobs, I know not what ground tone  
Of human agony."

Driven by lash of agony the poet goes back to  
his old faith. And so as pilgrim he finds  
himself at the medieval Carthusian monastery,  
high up among the hills of Switzerland.  
Through the gloom come whispers from his  
masters of his youthful days—

"What dost thou in this living tomb?"

He hastens to declare his unfaith. His is but  
the lingering love of that which was. And  
even as a Greek might stand in pensive mood  
and awe before some reminder of his dead faith,

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\* "Dover Beach." † Ib.

## II Penseroso

some shattered temple or fallen Runic stone,  
so—

“Wandering between two worlds, one dead,  
The other powerless to be born,  
With nowhere yet to rest my head,  
Like these on earth I wait forlorn.” \*

Though Christ is gone and all earth's morning,  
unshattered remains the base of duty.  
Arnold's ethical tone is ever strong and sure.  
Life must be lived in the shadow, yet even in  
the shadow it should be lived well. Tears cannot  
blind his eyes to the awful beauty of  
righteousness—

“‘Christ,’ some one says, ‘was human as we are;  
No Judge eyes us from heaven our sins to scan;  
We live no more when we have done our span’—  
‘Well then,’ for Christ thou answerest, ‘who can care?  
From sin, which heaven records not, why forbear?  
Live we like brutes our life without a plan’!  
So answerest thou; but why not rather say:  
Hath man no second life? *Pitch this one high!*  
Sits there no Judge in heaven our sins to see?—  
*More strictly than the inward Judge obey!*  
Was Christ a man like us? Ah! let us try  
If we then, too, can be such men as he!” †

The note is high. Arnold has retained his  
Christian idealism though he has lost his faith,  
and Israel's “secret” he reveres. But alas and  
alas that Mr. Arnold should not have seen that  
even his reverent iconoclasm has undermined  
the temple of that righteousness whose praises  
he so melodiously chants, and that in the tomb

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\* “The Buried Life.”

† “The Better Part.”

## Christ in English Literature

in which he has laid his Lord he has shut up humanity's only Hope and that "power not ourselves making for righteousness." 'Tis weary work, listening to words filled with the "sweetness, the gravity, the strength, the beauty and the languor of death"—to the mournful breaking of the waves of this—

"Unplumbed, salt, estranging sea."

The melancholy and the gloom of death are here. Let us away.

POETS OF PAGANISM

"If they did realize the pleasures of the Ideal now; if certain moments of their lives were high-pitched, passionately coloured, intense with sensation and a kind of knowledge, which, in its vivid clearness was like sensation, they paid a great price for them in the sacrifice of a thousand possible sympathies of things to be enjoyed only through sympathy from which they detached themselves in intellectual pride."—*Walter Pater* ("*Marius the Epicurean*,") p. 200.

"It is doubtless my bringing up which has something to do with it . . . partly is it my own fault; because I am putting points of interrogation all along the road of life and philosophize while others love only. Consequently that philosophy instead of giving me anything has eaten my heart away."—*Sienkiewicz* ("*Without Dogma*,") p. 131.

"'You don't understand'? enquired Foma, staring at Jarus with a grin . . . well . . . let's put it this way: A man is sailing on the river in a boat. . . . The boat is, presumably, a good one, but beneath it is, nevertheless, always a depth . . . the boat is stout . . . but if the man feels conscious of the dark depths beneath him . . . no boat will save him."—*Maxim Gorky* ("*Foma Goodyeff*,") p. 397.

## VI.

### POETS OF PAGANISM.

THERE is a body of literature—fortunately slight—that seems to lie altogether outside the Christian zone. This literature is remarkable for its well-nigh absolute imperviousness to Christian thoughts and ideals. Its distinction is not its reticence but its *hardness*. It sends forth neither the voice of revolt nor the plaint of the faith-bereft, but abides in a passionless unconcern. The Zeitgeist rests not upon it. The Star of Bethlehem does not light it nor the softness of a Christ-atmosphere wrap it round. Its sky bodies forth only heathenish constellations and never the cross which spells "Victory." It is not anti-Christian but un-Christian, lacking all the tender notes, the ever-widening vistas, the noble doctrines, of the Son of Man. Classical in form and melodious in utterance, it fills both eye and ear, though with no message for the heart and life. This Christ-alooofness means a world-alooofness as well, and it is deeply significant that this literature, with its somewhat arrogant divorcement from the Nazarene, is altogether out of touch with the life of to-day, in no respect either prophet or interpreter, voicing neither the aspirations

## Christ in English Literature

of men nor inspiring holiest endeavors. Ignoring Christ, it ignores man and its betrumpered creed-independence is a world isolation. Proof is here—proof indisputable—that any litterateur who enters not the carpenter shop where wrought Jesus of Nazareth, cannot enter the homes and hearts of men.

The most brilliant name in this cold and distant galaxy is Edgar Allan Poe. Though set so high, this star is yet cloud-shadowed and veiled by mist of tears. Its fascination is the fascination of genius and of sorrow. Through his incomparable word music, the cold glitter of his prose, the weird, somber, phantasmal creations of his heaven-scaling fancy, the poet grips you, and none the less through the pathos of his living, the ground-tone of grief, the tempests of his passions, impotence of willing, and the savage unrelentingness of a tragical poverty. But let not the human warmth and compassion springing forth at sight of him—this sorrow-haunted one with his strange appealingness as weakly he lets fall from nerveless fingers the reins of self-control, or as from agonized onlookings of his beautiful child-wife dying in destitution, he goes forth to barter his immortal wares for bread—blind us to the poet's essential immorality. We are not heartless. We take no joy in pointing out that Poe but

## Poets of Paganism

reaped the harvest he had sown. We are not ghouls, not like those

“That dwell up in the steeple  
All alone,  
And who, tolling, tolling, tolling,  
In that muffled monotone,  
Feel a glory in so rolling  
On the human heart a stone”—\*

not even the stone of justice.

His foibles and his sins—let us pass them by, remembering the rather how much he suffered and the disorders of a mind that dwelt not far from madness, but let not this heaven-born pity lure us to a forgetfulness of the low ethical quality of all the words and works of Edgar Poe.

Shall we use the word ethical at all? Is not this standard to be left out in all measurements of Poe? Is it too much to say that this poet had no dealings at all with morals? He was Hellenistic rather than Hebraic, and the Hebrew sense of righteousness, the ideal that blossomed after the waiting centuries in the Perfect Life, Poe regarded not at all. The study of his works with their Hellenic lightness and didactlessness has led us to anticipate his biographers and we are not surprised to learn of his fondness for the Greek tongue, his rather respectable classical attainments, and an early though abortive attempt to join insur-

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\* “The Bells.”

## Christ in English Literature

gent Greeks. Poe was an antique Greek born out of time and in an alien land. He is Athenian rather than American, a patrician rather than a democrat, a stoic, though straying in the gardens of Epicurus, rather than a Christian, and of the didactic in his work there is no trace. This criticism is not so shallow as to be splenetic over the mere absence of preachment from Poe's pages. Its concern goes deeper. It is disappointed because the ethical "tone" is always wanting, because there is no underlying granite stratum of creedal righteousness in these daisied fields. This omission was conscious and designed. In his essay on "The Poetic Principle," he speaks of what he terms "the heresy of *the didactic*," and his contention is that the ultimate object of all poetry is not truth, that poetry need not inculcate a moral, that the demands of truth are too severe and that "she has no sympathy with the myrtles." Not truth but beauty, is the inspiration of art. "The struggle to apprehend the Supernal Loveliness—this struggle on the part of those fittingly constituted—has given to the world all that which it [the world] has ever been enabled at once to understand and *to feel* as poetic." \* This philosophy was consistently carried out. Poe was a worshiper of

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\* "Works of Edgar A. Poe," Vol. I., p. 236.

## Poets of Paganism

the beautiful. His Gospels were written by Taste. He knelt at the shrine of Loveliness. It is as a worshiper he sings of Beauty—

“Helen, thy beauty is to me  
Like those Nicean barks of yore,  
That gently o’er a perfumed sea  
The weary, wayworn wanderer bore  
To his own native shore.

“On desperate seas long wont to roam,  
Thy hyacinth hair, thy classic face,  
Thy naiad airs have brought me home  
To the glory that was Greece  
And the grandeur that was Rome.

“Lo! in yon brilliant window niche  
How statue-like I see thee stand,  
The agate lamp within thy hand!  
Ah, Psyche from the regions which  
Are *Holy Land*.”\*

Yes, here was Poe’s Holy Land, and beside it there was no other. And the features of this Holy Land are “hyacinth hair,” a “classic face” and “naiad airs,” reminders of Roman grandeur and “the glory that was Greece”! Never did another poet of the first magnitude so dwell upon the surface, so insistently company with the outward and material. His is almost a child’s love for the spectacular. He kneels within the Coliseum and sings—

“Vastness! and age! and memories of eld!  
Silence! and desolation! and dim night!  
I feel ye now—I feel ye in your strength,  
O spells more sure than e’er Judæan King  
Taught in the gardens of Gethsemane.”†

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\* “To Helen.” † “The Coliseum.”

## Christ in English Literature

It is not so much the irreverence of these lines that draws our wonder as their poverty of spiritual conceptions and lack of vision. To proclaim that the monster slaughter-house of Rome, type forever of Cæsarean brutality and lust, this aging circle of senseless stones blackened by time and blood, had for him "spells more sure" than the mightiest drama of all the ages, is to proclaim the utter atrophy of the moral sense, lack of all nobleness of perception and sense of proportion, a childish crudity, which, awed by the vision of the outward, a monster pile of stone, is yet unmoved by the greater grandeur of the martyr-Christ.

Poe's "*un-Christianity*" may be seen also in his seeming utter unconsciousness of the stain of sin. In this respect he is a thorough-going pagan, and nowhere is the gulf between classic paganism and Christianity more bridgeless than in their respective views of sin, or the rather in the Christian sense of the defilement of sin as opposed to the pagan lack of this conception. The Greek, the Roman, knew of crime, of wrongdoing against the state or individual, but of sin as stain and hurt he knew nothing. Nor did Poe. His is a sense of failure, of life breakdowns, and his verse is heavy with unforgettable griefs, but nowhere is there a disturbing sense of sin and passionate lament over whiteness gone. He

## Poets of Paganism

comes sometimes to the study of an outraged conscience, as did the greater Hawthorne, but it is purely as an unimpassioned psychologist, attracted thither by the phantasmal horrors that start up in that dark land rather than by the grim, stern lessons to be learned and taught. His treatments of this theme are Hawthorne plus delirium tremens, as has been cynically suggested, and also Hawthorne minus the Voice that pleads for righteousness.

Nor was Poe a Christian in his view of the sanity and worth of life. The Christ said life was worth the while. To the poet life was a curse. Happiness was only fugitive and reminiscent. When only twelve years of age he wrote—

“The happiest day—the happiest hour  
Mine eyes shall see—have ever seen—  
The brightest glance of pride and power  
I feel—have been.”

And this Byronic melancholy clung to him to the last. The world is dark and there is no better day. A gallant knight rides forth seeking Eldorado and at last meeting a pilgrim shadow is told that—

“Over the mountains  
Of the moon  
Down the Valley of the Shadow”—\*

he must ride if he would find Eldorado. It is

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\* “Eldorado.”

## Christ in English Literature

not here. Life is pain. The dart has reached the heart—

“For alas! alas! with me  
The light of life is o’er!  
‘No more—no more—no more’—  
(Such language holds the solemn sea  
To the sands upon the shore)—  
Shall bloom the thunder-blasted tree,  
Or the stricken eagle soar”! \*

Dismal and dark is the earth journey; is our poet cheered by the thought of a better life to be and the dawning of the dear day? Dealer in dismalest death-ware, ghoulish and tragical, has he caught in the inner heart of him the high faith of the Nazarene in the “more abundant life” and beyond the “fever called living” here does he discern the supremest expressions and finest victories of life? Yes, no, and finally, no. Now and then in rarest moods he seemed to glimpse this comforting truth, and above the dull tread of those who carry away the confined dead he heard the rustle of angel wings, and along the eastern sky saw slowly creeping the tremulous flame, as when he cries, “All is Life—Life—Life within Life—the less within the greater and all within the Spirit Divine”; † and again—

“What matters it—  
What matters it, my fairest, and my best,  
That we go down unhonored and forgotten

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\* “Poems to One in Paradise.”

† “Works of Edgar A. Poe,” Vol. V., p. 150.

## Poets of Paganism

Into the dust—so we descend together,  
Descend together—and then—and then perchance—

*Lalage.* Why dost thou pause, Politian?

*Politian.* And then perchance

*Arise* together, Lalage, and roam

The starry and quiet dwellings of the blest.” \*

But this faith is too high for him, and Hope with broken wings sinks down into the sullen sea, the all-devouring sea, the sea where Death has reared himself a throne. For Poe’s is no message of life and his words, too heavy-sweet with roses, vibrate not with the might of the Master’s words, “I am the resurrection and the life.” Poe with his artist sense sees vividly the joy and fulness of life, sees the flash of it, all its brilliances and brave array, but most of all, oh horrors! he sees—

“A blood red thing that writhes from out  
The scenic solitude”;

and in tones of the madman shrieks—

“Out—out are the lights—out all!  
And, over each quivering form,  
The curtain, a funereal pall,  
Comes down with the rush of the storm;  
And the angels all pallid and wan,  
Uprising, unveiling, affirm  
That the play is the tragedy, ‘Man,’  
And its hero the Conqueror Worm.” †

His abiding credo is, “All is Death—Death—Death within Death,” and his triumphant “Eureka” but the herald of the Conqueror Worm.

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† “Scenes from Politian.”

† “The Conqueror Worm.”

## Christ in English Literature

Another star in this constellation, smaller than Poe, yet even colder in its glitter, is that of Henry D. Thoreau. Thoreau is to be remembered, if at all, as a poet. As a naturalist he was never in the front rank, lacking that nicety in detail of observation and classification so essential. As a philosopher he is inconsistent and contradictory to the point of comedy. He could never see but one truth at a time, and even that, alas, was too often a half truth or no truth at all. The mastery of labored reasoning he lacked altogether. Hence his philosophy is a jumble of Oriental conceits, Greek epigrams and transcendental Yankeeisms as incorrigibly eccentric as its author, lacking all poise, consistency and the sanity of order. But as a poet Thoreau merits our study. A poet in the narrow and technical sense he was not. His verse was as unmelodious as it was bizarre. He was altogether lacking in the lyrical faculty, nor did he possess the craftsman's skill. Emerson was right when he said of him, "His verses are often rude and defective. The gold does not yet run pure, is drossy and crude. The thyme and marjoram are not yet honey."\* Yet a poet in the larger sense of the word he unquestionably was, having the gift of imagination and sensitiveness of thought. And more than any other poet of our times he was the poet of

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\* "Lectures and Biographical Sketches," p. 433.

## Poets of Paganism

Paganism. His is not only an imperviousness to Christian sentiment, as was Poe's, but an aggressive and uncompromising advocacy of *un-Christian* thoughts and ideals. If Poe was negatively *un-Christian* Thoreau is positively so. As historian he must needs see Mounts Sinai and Olivet, but they are as nothing to his Parnassus and Olympus. This paganism, which with Poe was only an impulse and possibly unrecognized by himself, is with Thoreau both a creed and a passion. He, for all his Occidental and present-day birth, is but a reduced Aristotle, lacking only the range of the greater Greek. All this is boldly avowed. "I am not sure," he writes, "but that I should betake myself in extremities to the liberal divinities of Greece rather than to my country's God. Jehovah, though with us he has acquired new attributes, is more absolute and unapproachable, but hardly more divine, than Jove. He is not so much of a gentleman, not so gracious and catholic, he does not exert so intimate and genial an influence on nature as many a god of the Greeks. . . . In my Pantheon Pan still reigns in his pristine glory with his ruddy face, his flowing beard and his shaggy body, his pipe and his crook, his nymph Echo and his chosen daughter Iambe; for the great god Pan is not dead, as was rumored. No god ever dies. Perhaps of all the gods of New England I am most con-

## Christ in English Literature

stant at his shrine.”\* After this deliverance we are not surprised at his saying that Christianity is but a patched-up mythology. “One memorable addition to this old mythology is due to this era—the Christian fable. With what pains and tears and blood these centuries have woven this into the mythology of mankind, the new Prometheus! With what miraculous consent and patience and persistency has this mythus been stamped on the memory of the race! It would seem as if it were in the province of our mythology to dethrone Jehovah and crown Christ in his stead.”† But he is tolerant, this belated worshiper of the shaggy god. This keeper of the present-day Pantheon is quite willing to concede the Nazarene a small niche therein, and almost immediately after the foregoing deliverance adds, “It is not necessary to be Christian to appreciate the beauty and significance of the life of Christ. I know that some will have hard thoughts of me when they hear their Christ named beside my Buddha, yet I am sure that I am willing they should love their Christ more than my Buddha, for the love is the main thing, and I like him too.”

This over complacent and patronizing eclecticism was bottomed by no granite assurance

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\* “A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers,” p. 73.

† *Ib.*, p. 74.

## Poets of Paganism

and could by no means be brought within the category of reason.

Thoreau assigns this low place to Christ through no compulsion of reasoned judgment. The Master is robbed of his pre-eminence, not because the poet must needs so rob him through intelligent judgment, but through ignorance. Thoreau contends that we know not anything—

“Men say they know many things;  
But lo! they have taken wings—  
The arts and sciences,  
And a thousand appliances;  
The wind that blows  
Is all that anybody knows.” \*

This stock of knowledge is slim enough, surely, to satisfy even the economical Thoreau. There is hardly need for him afterwards to declare that he knew less than when he was born, and that “with respect to knowledge we are all children of the mist.” †

With this nerveless grasp of knowledge it is small wonder that in matters religious he should shrink from anything and everything that professed to be rooted in fact, in reality, and find a congenial habitat only in mist and dream. To his transcendental fancy, fact, history, life, form, was too crude and material to be linked with religion, which required only the “atmosphere” of the artist and a throne of cloud. “The wisest man,” he declares,

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\* “Walden,” p. 46. † “Excursions,” p. 205.

## Christ in English Literature

"preaches no doctrines; he has no scheme; he sees no rafter, not even a cobweb against the heavens. It is clear sky. . . . As for me, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob are now only the subtilest imaginable essences which would not stain the morning sky."\* But Christ was not so catholic and wise. "He had his scheme, his conformity to tradition which slightly vitiated his teachings. He preached some mere doctrines."† It is no matter of wonder that to this Oriental the clear outlines of the Christ story should be most unwelcome. Christianity is a historical religion rooted in facts, and Thoreau wanted only "subtilest essences" that "would not stain the morning sky."

It is easy to refer Thoreau's antagonism to the Christ to his thoroughgoing iconoclasm. He was a Protestant. Remarks Emerson acutely, "It cost him nothing to say No; indeed he found it much easier than to say Yes. It seemed as if his first instinct on hearing a proposition was to controvert it."‡ To the educational schemes of his day he said No; to commerce, No to philosophy, No; to social usage, No, he will go out by a pond, live in a shanty and hoe beans; to the state, No, he will not pay his taxes even, and goes to jail in sup-

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\* "A Week on the Concord and Merrimac," p. 77. † *Ib.*, p. 78.

‡ "Lectures and Biographical Sketches," p. 426.

## Poets of Paganism

port of his convictions; to the Church—how could it have been otherwise?—he says No, mightily pleased with his license-contradiction, that “atheism may comparatively be popular with God himself.” Yes, it is easy to refer this *un-Christianity* to the necessities of iconoclastic consistency, but, like all else easy, it is superficial and unsatisfying: the roots of the matter strike deeper. Thoreau was *un-Christian* not because of his iconoclasm but because of his *wildness*. The Christ stood for nurture, culture, training, discipline, self-control, and to all this Thoreau is temperamentally antagonistic. “Wildness,” he says, “is the preservation of the world.” “Ben Jonson exclaims,—

“‘How near to good is what is fair’;

So I would say—

“‘How near to good is what is wild.’”

Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, but in the impervious and quaking bog.”\* This quixotic philosophy he declares his readiness to put to the test if need be. “If it were proposed to me to dwell in the neighborhood of the most beautiful garden that ever human art contrived, or else of a dismal swamp, I should certainly decide for the swamp.”† This apostleship of the swamp runs through all the teachings of the poet

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\* “Excursions,” p. 188. † *Ib.*, p. 189.

## Christ in English Literature

and is indeed the key to their understanding. Everywhere does he plead for the swamp, the bog, the wild, the uncultivated. He stridently insists upon the wild in manners and, spurning all social usages and amenities, reduces his life to a savage simplicity, living in a shanty of his own coopering situated in a lonely wood, where even a door-mat given him by a friend is thrown away as savoring too much of the artificial. No, he will wipe his feet on the grass. As in manners, so in education, let the wild come in. "The great need," he declares "is of a Society for the Diffusion of Useful Ignorance."\* The great thing is to go barefoot. The curse of the age is clothes. Let the clothes be stripped off—morality with the rest. Though austere cold and virtuous, pattern of temperance and sobriety, and negatively a Christian moralist, he yet lacked the fulness of the positive Christian life and was an enemy outspoken to many of the Christ ideals. For the Christ ideal of service he had only superciliousness of attitude and words of scorn. "As for doing good, that is one of the professions which is full. Moreover, I have tried it fairly, and it does not seem to agree with my constitution."† And this doing good which society demanded of him he declared he would not do "to save the

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\* "Excursions," p. 203. † "Walden," p. 79.

## Poets of Paganism

universe from annihilation," and what good he may do will be aside from his main path and wholly unintended. He will do no man good, neither will he suffer any to minister unto him. "If I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious design of doing me good, I should run for my life as from that dry and parching wind of the African deserts called the 'simoom'."\* For the work of reformers he has only words of leaden hail—"the greatest bores of all, who thought that I was forever singing—

"This is the house that I built;

This is the man that lives in the house that I built;

but they did not know that the third line was—

"These are the folks that worry the man

That lives in the house that I built."

For the Christ doctrine of brotherliness he had no regard. He did not love men, he did not try to love them. He acknowledged no ties that bound him to them. He held that to be the best house which is inaccessible. He would be alone and nurse his savagery. "I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude."† If companions he must have, he prefers "wild ones." So uncompanionable was he, that one who stood closest to him said that he would no more think of taking his arm than of "taking

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\* "Excursions," p. 80. † "Walden," p. 147.

## Christ in English Literature

the arm of an elm tree." He was supremely self-centered and selfish. "Such are my engagements to myself," he once wrote in response to an invitation, "that I dare not promise." It was ever so. Always "engagements to myself," never the thought of others and the claims of brotherliness.

The Christ taught pity, forgiveness, love. Thoreau was a stranger to pity, but seldom in social relations rose above the impassive, and in these exceptional instances, to condemn rather than to approve. "Methinks I could hear with indifference if a trustworthy messenger were to inform me that the sun drowned himself last night."\* This was his normal mood. When spurred out of indifference it is but to declare—

"Indeed, indeed, I cannot tell,  
Though I ponder on it well,  
Which were easier to state,  
All my love or all my hate."

Afar from the Christ is he in his estimate of the importance of righteousness. With the grave words of the Master sounding in his ears, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," "What shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" he writes with levity: "Do not be too moral; you may cheat yourself out of much life

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\* "Excursions," p. 104.

## Poets of Paganism

so''; and all theological works—all books that attempt to treat of God, Providence and the life of the Spirit, he brushes contemptuously aside with, "Let us make haste to the report of the committee on swine."\* To Thoreau the ethical loomed not larger than to Poe, and, pagans both, they would in no wise suffer it to fill any large place in life. Barbarism, which is to say, wildness, is the insistent note in these gospels. And because the Christ claimed for the ethical the primacy, Thoreau was set against him. This Christ-righteousness was to his distorted vision too "Sundayish," too mawkish, and, "a healthy man," he declares, "with steady employment at wood-chopping at fifty cents a cord, and a camp in the woods, will not be a good subject for Christianity. The New Testament may be a choice book to him on some, but not on most, of his days. He will rather go a-fishing in his later hours."†

Like Poe, too, Thoreau found no cordial in the Christ revelation of victory over death. Yet they differ here. Poe's is the attitude of one sorrowingly beliefless; Thoreau does not care. To the continuance of life beyond the grave he is indifferent. He leans not forward to catch the note of triumphing life. Life is not so grand or sweet a thing that it mat-

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\* "A Week," p. 85. † *Ib.*, p. 81.

## Christ in English Literature

ters much if it shall go on. Indeed, his criticism of Christianity is that "it only hopes"; that "Christ taught humanity imperfectly how to live; his thoughts were all directed toward another world." \*

Perhaps in the whole range of English literature there is not elsewhere to be found such a pronounced *un*-sympathy with Christian sentiment and ideals, the very person of Jesus of Nazareth, as in the pages of Henry D. Thoreau. And so he makes but a sorry showing in the pattern of life he weaves. Without sociality, sympathy, love, pity, withdrawing from a world which from the tree-top he proclaims he despises, fighting no battles, bearing no burdens, intent only on his own fantastic culture, dubbed, even by his most sympathetic expositors, "skulker," he has but served to show us how mean and small even the life of a man of genius may be, and the tragical loss to those who find not Christ. It was written in the beginning of this chapter that a divorce from Christ meant divorce from man, that imperviousness to the Christ ideals meant aloofness from the world. Let the sentence stand buttressed by these notable examples. Of all the writers of their generation these two are the most insistently pagan in their thought and words, most openly *un*-Christian, and of their

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\* "A Week," p. 81.

## Poets of Paganism

generation also the most unhuman and unhelping. For the truest humanitarianism and the highest Christianity are one, and if any man loveth not the Christ, neither will he love his brother. And paganism is unbrotherliness.



## REDEMPTIVE IDEALS

"Hear me, O God, in my extremity!  
In fervent supplications up to thee,  
Up to thy heaven above I send my soul.  
The fragile texture of a spider's web,  
As a ship's cable, thou canst render strong;  
Easy it is to thine Omnipotence  
To change these fetters into spiders' webs.  
Command it, and these massy chains shall fall,  
And these thick walls be rent."

—*The Maid of Orleans, Act V., Sc. 11.*

"But it is in the closing scene of life, when man's boasted virtues become so intangible in his estimation that they elude his grasp, and sins and shortcomings little noted before start up round him like specters, that the scheme of Redemption appears worthy of the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, and when what the Savior did and suffered seems of efficacy enough to blot out the guilt of every offense. It is when the minor lights of comfort are extinguished that the Sun of Righteousness shines forth and more than compensates for them all."—*My Schools and Schoolmasters* (Hugh Miller), p. 364.

## VII.

### REDEMPTIVE IDEALS.

THE message of Christianity is the message of redemption. The story of Jesus is the story of salvation. Jesus is Savior. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." Bethlehem is deliverance. This redemption is for all—for the whole world, for the bad as for the good. The Christ Gospel is not for the righteous, but for sinners. To the most depraved and unhoping came this word of deliverance—to hated publican, to scurrilous brigand, to the woman at the well. For all there is hope. The prodigal son may come home, for the wandering sheep on the mountains the Shepherd is seeking, and over the return even of the vilest there is joy among the angels of God. He whose life is depicted in the Gospels is Prophet, Teacher, King, but above all, Savior. Does the New Testament open with the prophecy of redemption, it closes with its fulfillment, and from the city John saw comes last of all through the great gates never more to be closed, the song of the redeemed.

Now it need not be said that any Gospel is Christian through which is sounding this redemptive note. Men declare their companion-

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ship with Jesus and his mastership over them as in their works they show the ministries of redeeming love. No matter what his nominal creed may be, he is farthest from Christ who for all the distressful conditions of life sees no betterment, for its wounds no balm, for its sins no cure, and in the thick of a night of pain looks not for the break of dawn. And he is closest to Christ and most of all has felt his spell who believes human woes not immedicable, and to all who sorrow and are heavy laden comes with the words that soothe and cheer. He is un-Christian who believes that fate is strong, that adverse condition is strong, that folly is strong, that vice is strong, and who forgets that Christ is strong! he Christian and Christ-honoring who believes that men, no matter how far they have wandered from duty's path, and how thick beset with difficulties the return, no matter how seared the consciences of them and how dulled their vision, can yet from all hurtful entanglements and life-letting habits, all clings to an idolized forbidden and the wreck of unchecked desire, be brought safely off through the power of love in Christ. He is un-Christian who sees in the Nazarene no source of world deliverance, he Christ's man who believes the Christ can save.

This is the deepest going and most thorough test. Any writer can pronounce the shibbo-

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leths of the faith, but his real attitude towards the Christ is disclosed in his portrayals of redeeming or unredeeming ideals. How deals literature with this? Sees it light or darkness, deliverance or bondage for men? Sings or sings it not the songs of redemptive love?

Let it be answered broadly that most encouragingly does literature meet this test, most graciously and inspiringly are redemptive ideals wrought out. The statement is not all-inclusive, but among all writers of the first magnitude has longest reach. The exceptions are but foils. As foils with their forbidding gloom notice "Romola" and "The Raven." For scenic attractiveness, psychological analysis, and as exposition of her philosophic creed this Florentine drama of Romola is easily George Eliot's masterpiece. This story of a young Greek, who, early orphaned, drudge and slave of wandering minstrel, is rescued and adopted by the kind-hearted Baldassarre; who overtaken by storm at sea is separated from his protector, of whose fate he is ignorant, saving his own life through fortunate drifting, clinging to a spar; who cast by hap of fortune into that city which Dante loved, by his Greek beauty, quickness of wit and personal charm, finds open to him the gate of social and political advancement, and wins at single stroke, gold and fame and Baldo's queenly

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daughter, who, hearing at last from the lips of dying monk of his father's captivity and slavery, and the message that he, 'Tito, should sell the priceless gems, sea-rescued, and buy his rescuer's freedom, heeds not the pitiful need and prayer; who, coming by leaps and bounds through this initial treachery to all cowardly concealments, is startled at last in the duomo by the appearance of Baldassarre, whom in fright and cruelty he denounces as madman; who, from this act of final treachery sinking ever deeper and deeper comes to total estrangement from his wife, and save ignorant and childish 'Tessa, his plaything, receives not the power that comes from trust; who, thus self-outlawed, bearing with him only a torturing conscience and the shadow of a boundless hate, attempting to escape from the city whose liberties he had sold, is thrown by sternest retribution into the power of the waiting, hating Baldassarre, in whose dead clutch his stiffened body is found by passers-by—this story, though lightened here and there by wit and song and splendid with the charm and color of Florentine background, is heavily somber and tragical, and along every line of it unhoping and unhelped. Of redemption there is no hint. The chief personages of the story stagger beneath the burden of a tremendous woe. Upon all has the curse fallen. Savonarola's is the

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curse of self-deception. He is the dupe of delusions. Saddest blend of sincerity and insincerity he comes at last to falsest prophecies and most humiliating recantations. His great nobleness is obscured. He accomplishes nothing. The voice that fills the duomo with its suffocating and responsive throngs rings not clear. His goodness is tainted. Even before he was stripped of his priestly robes in the final hour of his degradation he had let slip from him the mantle-grace of sincerity. In an age of falseness, even the great preacher is not true. The voices he heard were not from heaven. The mysterious signs and apparitions were not in the sky, but in his own disordered mind. He had sought his own glory and not the public good, or at best, both. The martyr is dis-crowned.

Baldassarre's is the curse of hate. From the hour when the revelation of Tito's treachery came to him he lived only to hate. Robbed of all softness, pity, he feeds only upon the thought of revenge. His every spring is poisoned. All loveliness and nobleness in him fade out. He gloats upon the thought of his victim's sufferings, and Tito's groans to come are as music to his ears. He feels the soft slippings of the dagger into the loathed body, his fingers in insane anticipation are at the throat of the traitor. He will kill, yet not

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too quickly. He will the rather inflict an eternity of suffering, and long, long, shall the victim writhe in his relentless toils. He has ceased to be a man, is tigerish, fiendish, unhuman. This is the curse of Baldassarre, and from it he cannot escape. For him there comes no rational employment, no moments of sane reflection, no gentle memories giving to him his manhood back again. His very impotence only adds to his hate, and utterly savage and demoniacal is the picture of the old man crawling out from miserable hovel into the sun, nursing his strength for the coming murder, fondling the sharpened knife. Though the past is recalled when Tito comes to him and calls "Padre mio," he relents not; that past is dead and to the insinuating and liquid words, "I came to ask your forgiveness," he has only the gasping, "I saved you—I nurtured you—I loved you. You forsook me—you robbed me—you denied me—you have made the world bitterness to me—but there is one drop of sweetness left—*that you shall know agony.*" Salvation there was none for Baldassarre. On and on he must go to his disgustful and unhuman satisfaction, on and on to the cruel and insane deed. The hour arrives. The traitor is done to death, and in that loathsome embrace and on the trampled grass rests the body of the murderer, dead through the delirium of a gluttoned revenge, the

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face wearing still its hideous and inextinguishable hate.

Romola's is the curse of disappointment. Ariadne was all too soon discrowned. To her father's dearest wishes she seemed to herself a traitor. The roses of love had withered. Her dream-life was at an end upon the discovery of her husband's baseness. The dreadful dream of her brother, Dino, had come true.

"Romola, in the deep night as I lay awake, I saw my father's room and I saw you—you were revealed to me as I see you now, with fair, long hair, sitting before my father's chair. And at the leggio stood a man whose face I could not see. I looked and looked and it was a blank to me, even as a painting effaced; and I saw him move and take thee, Romola, by the hand; and then I saw thee take my father by the hand, and you all then went down the steps into the street, the man whose face to me was a blank leading the way. And you stood at the altar in Santa Croce, and the priest who married you had the face of death; and the graves opened and the dead in their shrouds rose and followed you like a bridal train. And you passed on through the streets and the gates into the valley, and it seemed to me that he who led you hurried you more than you could bear, and the dead were weary of following you and turned back to their graves. And at last you came to

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a place where there was no water and no trees or herbage, but instead of water I saw a written parchment unrolling itself everywhere, and instead of trees and herbage I saw men of bronze and marble springing up and crowding round you. And my father was faint for the want of water, and fell to the ground; and the man whose face was a blank, loosed thy hand and departed. And thou, Romola, didst wring thy hands and seek for water and there was none." \*

Was her dying brother gifted with super-human prescience? Relentless had been the truthfulness of that vision. She had come to the place which was waterless and she *was alone*. The mystical raptures of the great preacher at the duomo no longer appealed to her. For Romola, Duty had neither voice nor pointing hand. No angel came with a clear message. Her father was dead, and, saddest of all, she bore in her heart a dead love. "And water there was none." True were the words of her, "There is no compensations for the woman who feels that the chief relation of her life has been no more than a mistake. She has lost her crown. The deepest secret of human blessedness has half whispered itself to her and then forever passed her by." †

No compensations? No ameliorations? No

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\* "Romola," p. 148. † *Ib.*, p. 452.

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deliverance? To George Eliot's vision, none. The life goes out in darkness. Though after the heroine's flight she is brought back home by the author and made to serve as protectress and guardian to Tessa's children, it seems to be but a clumsy addition to the narrative, whose artistic close had come already. It would have been better from the art standpoint to have left her where George Eliot's philosophy would leave her, unhelped, almost uncaring, beneath a sky unnoting, in an open boat on a treacherous sea—adrift.

Tito's was the curse of selfishness. Beautiful as a Greek god, and with all coveted graces of person and mind, that sunny, jocund life darkens through selfishness into the life morose, cowardly, intriguing, ungrateful, treacherous. He sells himself to falsehood and pays interest mounting ever higher. He becomes the slave of his past, and more and more feels the pressure and the tyranny of consequence. He is doomed. He might have been saved. A true friend might have saved him. Romola, had she been less hard, could have effected his deliverance. Salvation he might have found through repentance. But no, all gates are shut in his face. He must not be saved, he must be damned. The author will have it so. No redemptive influence is to be introduced, no glimpse at the triumph of sacrificial love. Tito

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must die. The author has so decreed. Baldassarre is not more relentless than she. Baldassarre would kill the body, she would strangle the soul. George Eliot knows not the song of redemption, and so upon all—death. The book closes with a moan. It might have closed with a carol.

Poe's "Raven" is not only musical, but philosophical, and a bit of autobiography as well. For this mournfully melodious poem is at once, save "The Bells," that poem by whose magical mystery of music the name of Poe will live and the philosophical creed so tragically incarnated in the poet's life. With no attempt at technical and labored exposition "The Raven" is a picture of the Irreparable, the threnody of the Irreversible Past. The inspiration of the song is the Irreparable in the poet's own life. He had failed. His past was perverse and goading. And it was the fall of the over-confident and self-sufficient. Poe held defeat over cheap. With no thought of danger he braved the storm. He would lean upon himself. Vivid is the moment of which his biographer writes when speaking of the establishment of a journal, Poe, with flashing eyes, declares, "I must and will succeed." \* The will he held was well-nigh omnipotent, and Ligea is the fantastic and mor-

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\* "Life of Edgar A. Poe," p. 181.

## Redemptive Ideals

bid exposition of the poet's creed, that not even death itself can annihilate Will. It is of will-strength he sings—

“And neither the angels in heaven above  
Nor the demons down under the sea  
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul  
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee.”\*

The will is supreme. “Man doth not yield himself to angels nor to death utterly save only through the weakness of his own feeble will.”† Alas that so strong a thing should yet be so weak a thing, and that he who so triumphantly declared, “I will succeed,” should come to well-nigh utter wreck! But such is the irony of history. The life has been but illy lived and the sorrowful mistakes of it cast their shadows over him. In heavy-hearted introspection and musing memory he sits alone. Nay, he is not alone. The Past is with him. In the bleakness of the December night, when the fitful glare of each dying ember seemed as uncanny ghost upon the floor, he has been looking at that past of which those dying embers were, alas! too true a symbol, and in that vision finds only sorrow. Memory brings no joy, it brings only pain with its vision of the “Lost Lenore,” the opportunity unseized, the radiant glory of which he had been discrowned. And along with pain there is a creeping dread.

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\* Poem—“Annabel Lee.” † “Ligea.”

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Mastered by fantastic terrors, the door is flung open to an imaginary guest with incoherent words of welcome and apology—

“‘Sir,’ said I, ‘or Madam, truly your forgiveness I implore:

But the fact is I was napping, and so gently you came rapping,  
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door.’”

But outside—“darkness, and nothing more.” Again a “tapping” and this time though opening shutter, to frenzied invitation, steps “a stately raven” which—

“With mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door—  
Perched upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door.”

This bird with its croaking “nevermore,” what is it but the proclaimer of Poe’s dolorous creed that redemption, deliverance there is none? Ah, to be tied to this corpse of a misspent past is unendurable. The loathed horror of it grows and grows. But will not this torture have an end? Will not the Irreversible yield itself to new endeavors and the Irreparable to pleading cry change its face of stone? Other things have passed, will not this?—

“Other friends have flown before!

On the morrow *he* will leave me as my Hopes have flown before.”

Then the bird said “nevermore.” What, no closing of the tired eyes, no rest of racking brain, no surcease of aching sorrow?—

“‘Wretch,’ I cried, ‘thy God hath lent thee—by these angels he  
hath sent thee

Respite—respite and nepenthe from thy memories of Lenore!

Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget the lost Lenore!’”

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Quoth the raven, "nevermore." There is no forgetfulness, no kind nepenthe. The pain abides. The ache lives on.

Well, then, if we may not forget, if the past in vivid way stays with us, the close, clinging shadow from which there is no escape, is there not some relief from the pressure of this memory? Cannot wounds be healed and sore-hearted ones made well? If there is no redemption in memory, is there not elsewhere a cleansing ministry? For the broken yesterdays with their weight of sinning is there not atonement?—

"'Prophet,' said I, 'thing of evil!—prophet still, if bird or devil!—  
Whether Tempter sent, or whether tempest tossed thee here  
ashore,  
Desolate yet all undaunted, on this desert land enchanted—  
On this Home by horror haunted—tell me truly, I implore—  
Is there—*is* there balm in Gilead?—tell me!—tell me, I  
implore!' "

Quoth the raven, "nevermore." What, never! If not now, in the long afterwhile, the far-spaced future, "the distant Aidenn," is there not rest—and the clasping of that—

"Sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore?"  
. . . . .

Yet once more the raven, "nevermore." Crushed by this burden of the Irreparable and the Unattainable in the very insanity of agony, the poet yet again cries out for relief—

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"Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore!

Leave no black plume as a token of that lie thy soul hath spoken!

Leave my loneliness unbroken!—quit the bust above my door!  
Take thy beak from out my heart, and take thy form from off my door!"

Still the unheeded cry. Fate is inexorable. No angel of deliverance invades that grewsome, pain-shotted silence. No note of redemption silences the raven's croak. No radiance of hope lightens that heavy gloom. The raven's word is in the ear, his beak is in the heart, and the soul

"From out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
Shall be lifted—nevermore!"

As from out the fetid tomb, ghoul-haunted and ghost-vexed, with the rattle of bones and the quaver of the spectral dead disturbing us, we come into the world of Dickens—a world of mountains and plains, and seas and forests and singing birds—of deserts, too, but with living oases and the charm of flowers, of clouds, but of clouds which even while they shadow distil the refreshing rain—a world over which the sun rides in his glory and where night means not pain, but rest and dream—a world neither barren nor held in the unrelaxing grip of a fate un pitying, but fruitful and blest and filled with gracious ministrants of a redeeming love—Christ's world because echoing with the song of salvation.

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Charles Dickens was neither preacher nor elaborator of monkish creeds, and far soars his art above the clumsy artisan trick of tedious moralizing, yet above all the romancers of his day he was pre-eminently Christian through his clear discernment of mediatorial influences and the ministries of world-healing. He is no stupid optimist, closing his eyes to earth-ringing tragedies and the tears thick falling on new made graves—he sees it all—the wreck, the sorrow, and the bitterness that springs from death, but he sees, too, the cloud-rifting sunlight, the flowers upspringing through the rain of tears, the branches that sweeten the bitter waters, the Physician who can make all whole. He sees the world, not as deformed, but as being transformed into beauty through the energy and constancy of love. He hears it saying, not “I am lost,” but “I am being saved.”

Dickens sees men weak and erring, but will not believe them damned, feeling that even for the tragicalist sin-smitten, there are the tender words, “Thy sins are forgiven thee”—“Go thy way and sin no more.” He is not malignant. He will not make a world unblest; he will set working along with the forces that break down and hurt, the forces that repair and heal. He cannot be brought to feel that there is healing for a scarred oak and not for a scarred soul, that the infinite is more gracious to a tree

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than to a man. Hence, through all the works of the novelist runs this redemptive principle. He ranges far, but nowhere sees the gate that Dante saw with its glooming gospel, "All hope abandon ye who enter here." He has heard the voice of the lark, but not the croak of the raven. He has found Titos and Romolas and Baldassarres, but not to hurl them into a bottomless hell. In Florence he could have discovered not so much of art, maybe, as his gifted countrywoman, but be sure somewhere in those olive gardens or majestic churches, a ministrant of healing, a something for each and all of those troubled ones in that tempestuous story. For briefest study examine the "Tale of Two Cities." Here is a story with raw material enough for any pessimist. The imprisonment of Dr. Manette—that long, dayless imprisonment whose dungeon horror, uncheered by sight of human face, or sound of human voice, not only wrecks the body, but darkens the fine mind of the physician—the French Revolution whose lofty ideals and generous aspirations keep sorriest company with brutality, treachery, cruelty, the wildest license of the human beast unleashed. Dickens is never parsimonious, and in the crime-soaked, horror-haunting material of this story, he is prodigal. It is no millennial world upon which we look out, but full of ugly-

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ness, full of passion, full of woe. It is not peopled with saints, this world, but with erring men and women. Yet it is a world which God has not been willing to forsake. It is not a stranger to redemption. Upon the felt black of the story falls the whiteness of a redeeming life, and "A Tale of Two Cities" is "the redemption of Sydney Carton."

This man, Sydney Carton, Dickens takes at his worst. He is the slave of appetite. Though with rarest intellect, through the steady degradations of drink he has come to oblivion and failure. Upon a man with a meaner intellect and with far less of nobility, he is driven to depend for even his coarse and scanty living. His friends have all deserted him. He is alone. He is hopeless. He is no longer man. He is "the jackal." The slightest picture of him, Rembrandtesque in its light and shadow, will suffice. He is going home from a night of carousal and of work.

"Waste forces within him and a desert all around, this man stood still on his way across a silent terrace, and saw for a moment, lying in the wilderness before him, a mirage of honorable ambition, self-denial and perseverance. In the fair city of the vision, there were airy galleries from which the loves and graces looked upon him, gardens in which the fruit of life hung ripening, waters of hope that sparkled in

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his sight. A moment and it was gone. Climbing to a high chamber, in a well of houses, he threw himself down in his clothes on a neglected bed, and his pillow was wet with wasted tears. Sadly, sadly the sun rose; it rose upon no sadder sight than the man of good abilities and good emotions, incapable of their directed exercise, incapable of his own help and his own happiness, sensible of the blight on himself and resigning himself to let it eat him away.”\*

Nothing sadder beneath the sun and nothing more hopeless. He weeps, but they are but “wasted tears”; he is sensible of the blight, but has “resigned himself to let it eat him away.” Has he at least not passed beneath the gloom-weighted portals of the Dautean dream? Is not he to “abandon” hope? Nay, Dickens will not have it so. Goodness in Carton is not dead but sleeping; nobility, not lost, only sin-encrusted, and that sleeping thing is waked, that sin-encrusted glory brought to view through gracious miracle wrought by the fair-haired daughter of Doctor Manette. The All-Father had not forgotten his poor, erring child, and sent an angel to deliver him. That angel was. Lucie Manette. In her purity and freshness as she came outwardly into his life she reminded him of all that he was, all that he had lost, all that he wished he might

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\* “A Tale of Two Cities,” p. 88.

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be, if but for her sake. His young manhood's ambitions came back to him, though freed from weight of dross and the yet dearer days of childhood and mother-love. Once more the dream and hope. Not that he thought himself worthy of her or hoped ever to fill the place in her heart he knew was taken already by another. Her presence was as a shrine, and to her stainless altars he brought in the fullness of self-abnegation, the love that knew not self. He would not possess her. He would worship. He would carry in his heart her cleansing memory, only craving that she might ever know of his deep though dumb devotion and his heart's desire that in some way in the distant coming days he might serve some one whom she had loved. At first Carton did not dare to hope for his own salvation, but through the growing richness of his unselfish and boundless love his life came ever more and more to nobleness, though its highest reaches were not yet.

The years pass with their hurrying events, and at last Charles Darney, whose good fortune it was to claim the hand of Lucie Manette, was thrown into prison by the Extreme Revolutionists; brought to trial, acquitted, rearrested, found guilty, sentenced to the guillotine, remanded to prison. Then came the one-time "jackal" to his crowning. In Sydney Carton

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is born the noble resolve, for the sake of the woman who as a saint in heaven he yet loved, to take, through a fortunate physical resemblance, the place of Charles Darney and die in his stead. The substitution is effected. In the black trumbril he rides toward death, but he is not afraid. His is the girding of a noble accomplishment, the calm dignity of those who lay down their lives for others, the joy of the vision of the life that has been righted, the gladness of the redeemed. At last, at last for the life so maimed and broken there was the free offering of the noblest atonement he could make—the gift of his life for another. Nor did he journey toward the shadow, for clear-sounding above all the cries of the city were the words he first heard when a little boy by his father's grave: "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Neither would his sacrifice be in vain. A vision of the future rises up and comforts him. "I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful and prosperous and happy in that England which I shall see no more. I see her with a child upon her bosom who bears my name. I see her an old woman, weeping for me on the anniversary of this day. I see her and her

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husband, their course done, lying side by side in their last earthly bed, and I know that each was not more honored nor held more sacred in the other's soul than I was in the souls of both. I see that child who lay upon her bosom and who bore my name, a man, winning his way up in that path of life which once was mine. I see him winning it so well that my name is made illustrious there by the light of his. I see the blots I threw upon it faded away. I see him, foremost of best judges and honored men, bringing a boy of my name with a forehead that I know, and golden hair, to this place—then fair to look upon, with not a trace of this day's disfigurement—and I hear him tell the child my story with a tender and faltering voice. "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest I go to than I have ever known." \* No wonder that in death they said of him "that it was the peace fullest man's face ever beheld," for it was the face of the redeemed.

'Tis a far cry from "A Tale of Two Cities" to "Saul," and yet here is the same gospel sounding, the same priceless assuringness, the same cheer and strength of redemption and reconstruction. For Browning's, too, is the Christ message—the message of salvation. There is sore need of saving. The giant Saul has

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\* "A Tale of Two Cities," p. 350.

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fallen. The morning of his coronation was bright and fair, but shadowed is the noon-day of his reigning. Tall he was above all his fellows, and this nobleness makes only the sadder the tragedy of his fall. Dizzied by sudden and unlooked for elevation, puffed up by the pride of power newly found, he dares to disobey the divine mandate and sets himself against the Infinite. His rebellion is no more impotent in its sequence than pitiable and tragical through all its drear unwindings. Woe unto him who breaks with God! Saul is rebel and must pay the rebel's price. Gone is his real kingliness, his communion with the Eternal, his dear trust in God, his joy-lit days, and present, as living torturers, the memory of this departing, biting envy and the outraged conscience that wars with sleep. The Hebrew record in pictorial startlingness compresses and yet intensifies the tragicalness of the story when it declares that an "Evil Spirit fell upon Saul." We have fronted this Evil Spirit before. Its shadows we have seen upon the face of Tito, of Baldassarre, of the lonely one who kept his vigils in the raven-haunted home. Will this Spirit of Evil go or stay? It abode with the dream children of George Eliot and Edgar Allan Poe. Will it abide with Saul?

Upon the great cross-support in the center of the tent, with outstretched arms and unrelax-

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ing muscle, hangs heavily Saul—"drear and stark, blind and dumb." For three days he had hung there in awful movelessness, and the anxious watchers knew not whether in that black mid-tent's silence the struggle of Saul and the Spirit had ended; knew not if life or death had got the victory. David comes—in his freshness and radiant beauty, the sunshine on his hair and dewy lilies freshly gathered twining his harp-strings round—comes to help. Stooping, he enters the unlooped tent, and over the burnt-up grass crawls to the inmost inclosure. At first he sees naught but blackness, then the vast upright main prop looming blackly into distinctness, and then, Titanic, blackest of all, the figure of—Saul. For this battered, beaten spirit is there help?

Listen to David's music. From harp strings sweet with the breath of the lilies come first and fittingly shepherd tunes, the simple strains the sheep know, as slowly they come from pleasant pasturings to be folded; then the tunes to which crickets love to listen, and through whose sweet beguilements birds will leave their mates—nature-music, simple, artless, with the breath of flowers and the voice of murmuring brooks.

The music mounts and broadens, and from the harp fall the heartening songs of the reapers, followed quickly by the strains that

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shake the heart to sobs when the dead man, his "few faults shut up like dead flower-ets," is "praised on his journey"; then the chant of the marriage, the martial music of the march, the noble, intoned chorus the Levites sing as they go up to the altar "in glory enthroned."

A shuddering of the king checks the minstrel, but Saul's body stirred not yet and the music goes on. It tells of life, body-life, and the tumultuous joy of the senses, of home and parents and brothers helping, and then of the gladness of the coronation day, when the crown which told of high ambitions and deathless deeds was placed upon the head and the people cried, "King Saul."

But David's heart is nobler than his muse thus far. He would touch Saul once more to life, not only through the memories of nature's sweetness, of childhood, manhood joys, kingly glories, but facing him toward the future, the ever opening vistas of days to be, shows him the immortality of deeds, and how that he, Saul, shall live in graciousness and glory of renown.

What more to sing? David knows not. He is filled with a strange yearning to completely restore his king and round him into all completeness. He cannot, and yet the ardent wish remains. But if *he* so wishes it, will not the

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Infinite wish it, too, and through his loving Omnipotence effect fullest cure?

“Would I fain in my impotent yearning, do all for this man,  
And dare doubt *he* alone shall not help him, who yet alone can?  
Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare will, much less  
power,

To bestow on this Saul what I sang of, the marvelous dower  
Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to make such a soul,  
Such a body and then such an earth for insphering the whole?  
And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm tears attest)  
These good things being given, to go on and give one more, the  
best?

Aye, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain at the heights

This perfection—succeed with life’s dayspring, death’s minute of night?

Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul, the mistake,  
Saul the failure, the ruin he seems now—and bid him awake  
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find himself set  
Clear and safe in new light and new life?”

The question is answered by a mighty faith. God can and will. The divine love will not desert man in his sore need. The sinner need not despair. There is gladness and freeness of redemption—

“O Saul, it shall be

A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me  
Thou shalt love and be loved by forever; a Hand like this hand  
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!”

Here is no dolorous croak of the raven; but the sifting of white starlight down upon the heart.



THE PLAINT OF THE PESSIMIST

"But though the doctrine of the determination of the will does not tell against the possibility of happiness it cannot be too often repeated that a disciplined will is one of its first conditions. It may be well to reiterate that the greatest foe to happiness, greater, possibly, than an unhappy temperament, is the want of the higher volitional power of self-restraint. Men make themselves miserable, as the pessimist so often tells us, by vain desire; and it is, as I have remarked, the highest function of a disciplined will to restrain desire."—*Pessimism* (*James Sully*), p. 338.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE PLAINT OF THE PESSIMIST.

INTELLECTUALLY, the literature of pessimism is close akin to the literature of sadness. It voices the same dreary doubts, the same dismal disbeliefs. The difference between these two literatures is solely in spirit. For pessimism is sorrow with a dash of bitterness. It takes not its burdens submissively, but rebelliously. It can do more than weep, it can curse. The curse may be impotent, but none the less with savage exultation is it flung out into the void. Mere weeping it holds womanish, and at sight of the world-woe, hurls, it knows not upon what or whom, its passionate imprecations.

Least bitter of all her class, more plaintive, is George Eliot. Her pessimism is not far removed from a hopeless melancholy. When but a young woman she parts with the orthodox faith, and deeply influenced by Mill, Lewes, Spencer, Auerbach, becomes at last an ardent apostle of the doctrines of Auguste Comte, denying in toto the supernatural, worshipping humanity as God, rejecting all hope of a personal immortality and finding only in altruism the springs of philanthropic endeavor. Her opposition to the Christian religion she

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took no pains to conceal. She was not given to conciliation or evasion.

Gibbon, finding that his analysis of the causes of the early growth of the Christian Church, as given in his great history, was distasteful to many and made for his unpopularity, inwardly relenting, writes, "Had I believed that the majority of English readers were so fondly attached to the name and shadow of Christianity, I might, perhaps, have softened the two invidious chapters which created so many enemies and conciliated so few friends." \* But George Eliot had more of hickory in her honesty and would by no means have modified her views to suit the beliefs of the multitude. However mistaken, she was honestly mistaken and swerved not a hair's breadth from the track of intellectual probity. She had no sympathy with the church and took no pains for its concealing.

Yet, like Arnold and Clough, George Eliot was ever hovering about Christianity, trying to find some comfort in its spiritualized meanings, loving better than all things else even the ivy that covered its altars overthrown and the echoes of the voices that were stilled. It was this heart-love that enabled her to portray in such winsome way the sweet faith and trust of Dinah and Seth Bede and to enter into such

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\* "Memoirs," p. 24.

## The Complaint of the Pessimist

sympathetic understanding of the mighty faith of Savonarola. To this gifted woman Christianity was altogether unhistorical, and yet she liked to call herself a Christian and to wake through poetic imagination and tender idealizations its dead forms of faith. She thought she might have the spirit without the person of Christ, the morality and ideals of the Master apart from their living center. She would rob Christianity of all historic content and yet treasure its empty storehouse. She would take away the substance of religion and yet cling with womanly abandon of love to its shadow. But to her, also, Christ was not risen, and this desolating unfaith swept from her years both joy and peace, bringing as its melancholy heritage a pessimism that casts its baleful shadows across all her works. Christ was not risen; beyond the grave was nothing, and hence life to her loses all divine meanings and is shut up with the mean and the trivial through all its eventless days. In one of her letters she declared that "life is a bad business at best," and to a friend one time, affirmed that she regarded it as a great wrong and injustice that she had ever been born. This pessimism was not personal and blighting solely, but gloomed all her works. Her characters reach no lofty heights. They fail in all their noblest aspirations. Romola fails, unable to preserve her father's

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library; Fidelma fails, missing the crown of love; Zarca fails, his dreams of a united and noble people ground by a relentless fate; Tom and Maggie Tulliver fail in their highest endeavors and are engulfed in the raging flood. And fail does Lydgate and Gwendolen and Daniel Deronda, and yet a nobler—Miss Brooke—coming from star-shod dreams to most commonplace endings and humiliations of defeat. And such failures are made more unbearable through the pettinesses and meannesses that bring them about. These men and women do not fail in combat with the gods, but with everyday trivialities and mishaps. The fine blade is not broken in furious tilt with giant enemy; it rusts. The knight does not fall through thrust of spear; he has his neck broken by the stumble of his horse.

This life failure is not personal, but racial. It is not the individual who fails, it is the race that fails. It is not the failure of the moment, it is the failure of all the past. The "terrible vitality" of deeds is not limited to the individual life. Every man harvests not only his own sowing, but the sowing of all his ancestors. And there has ever been foolish sowing. The to-day is determined by the yesterday, and that yesterday was ignoble. We can never—with cheerless yet never wearying iteration in all

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her works, she tells us—get out of the clutch of the past, which is the misspent.

After a night so dark one would look for a day of brightness, but not so does George Eliot. For the bitterness and the poverty of life she sees no recompense in a life to come. Everything ends at the grave. For herself, for the race, she expects nothing. Her noblest prayer that she might “join the choir invisible” is the unlit declaration that for a personal immortality she hopes not, and that only as an *influence*, albeit a noble influence, does she pray she may live on. She has bidden good-bye to the Christ doctrine of life, and strangely enough endeavors to dignify the meanness and paltriness of life, as she has pictured it, through the oncoming of death. That which gives life its dignity and dearness is the thought that it shall end! Its glory is its mortality. This doctrine is worked out in her most praiseworthy poem, “The Legend of Jubal.” Here Cain is represented as fleeing from the wrath of God to far-off lands, where he hopes to keep ever from his descendants the horror and mystery of death. But at last, through accident, one of Lamech’s sons is killed. Unused to death, the generations stand gazing at the dead face, until Cain, pushing his way through the throng cries,—

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“He will not wake;  
This is the endless sleep, and we must make  
A bed deep down for him beneath the sod.”

In such wise was ushered in the tragedy. But most wonderful!—

“No budding branch, no pebble from the brook;  
No form, no shadow, but new dearness took  
*From the one thought that life must have an end!*”

To most of us this will seem but a sorry compensation.

Nor does this sublimated consolation seem to have afforded much help to the people in her books. Life still, even with this “new dearness” was to them, even as to their Creator, “a bad business at the best,” and theirs is a dumb uncomplainingness that ever they were born. The well known incident in her life, recorded by Mr. Meyers, shows the unlighted gloom of what she was pleased to regard as her philosophy and her religion. “I remember,” says he, “how at Cambridge I walked with her once in the Fellow Garden of Trinity on an evening of rainy May, and she, stirred somewhat beyond her wont, and taking as her text, these three words, God, Immortality, Duty, pronounced with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the *first*, how unbearable was the *second*, and yet how peremptory was the *third*. Never, perhaps, had sterner accents affirmed the sovereignty of impersonal and unrecompensing law. I listened, and night fell; her

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grave, majestic countenance turned toward me like a sibyl in the gloom; it was as though she withdrew from my grasp, one by one, the two scrolls of promise and left me the third scroll only, awful with inevitable fate."

We owe no thanks to sibyl or to woman, who takes from humanity's trembling hands the scrolls of promise, leaving only the scroll of the inevitable. No other testimony to the sun is ever so eloquent as the darkness that comes with its withdrawing, and never was there more potent evidence of the life-giving power of the Sun of Righteousness than the gloom of its passing from the life and words of Marian Evans.

The pessimism of Thomas Carlyle is bitterer and yet even more depressing. This evil came with the philosopher's later days. In his youth his was the voice of faith. His words were heartening. His work was constructive. He came, then, as he proudly declared, with a hammer for building, and not with the torch for burning. His songs put iron in men's veins. But these radiant days soon gave way to a darkness unrelieved. He ceased to lead, ceased to inspire, ceased to gladden. From a prophet he degenerated into the scold. From the triumphant leader he falls into the discouraging pessimist. The world changes to him from a Paradise into an Inferno. All things have gone

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wrong. There is no soundness anywhere. Life is an agony, the heaven a thing of brass. Men are fools or knaves. There is no reality, only unreality; no sincerity, only shams and hypocrisies. The rich are vulgar, the poor are brutalized; only the Devil retains his respectability. Nature, one time his inspirer, gives only pain. Leigh Hunt, walking with him, looking up at the star-sown vault, exclaims, "Oh, how beautiful"! quoth Carlyle, "Oh, how terrible." In a company of friends, when the merry laugh went round, he exclaims, "My friends, I do not laugh, I am the more inclined to weep"—to weep over imagined national and social degeneracies, the pitilessness of nature, the blindness of Providence and the silence of God. Walking in his garden he repeats Goethe's well known lines—

"Stars over us silent,  
Graves under us silent,"—

and with a sob continues, "no help from either. This gloom he was not content to abide in alone. He would wrap it round the world. The optimism of others worried him. A single ray of human happiness disturbed his distempered vision. He would have all dwell as he in the night, and for the world's symbols the cross-bones and skull.

That this biliary blackness, his savage onslaught on men and things, is to be at-

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tributed to his loss of faith, hardly admits of questioning. From the rock-assurance of a Puritan faith he passed into the weakness of doubt and swiftly afterwards into unrayed denial. In boyhood, a sincere believer in the divinity of Jesus, he hurries through all intermediacies into a vague and unrimmed Pantheism. In his earlier work the Nazarene receives a warmth of tribute. But this note passes away. He quotes approvingly Goethe's discriminating estimate of the Christ in his *Wilhelm Meister*.\* But only the fine phrase, the "worship of sorrows," does he cling to, and the historicity of the Christ-story fades away. "Knowest thou that 'worship of sorrow?' The Temple thereof founded some centuries ago, now lies in ruins, overgrown with jungle, the habitation of doleful creatures."† The Christ was not divine and all belief in him has come thus to ruin; but as George Eliot, so Carlyle insisted that, though the Christian *fact* had perished, the ideal still survived, and that if one groping amidst the ruins of that temple were to venture forward, he would find "in a low crypt, arched out of falling fragments, the altar still there and its sacred lamp perennially burning." The old forms are dead, historical Christianity is unbelievable. But is there not

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\* "Critical and Miscellaneous Essays," p. 238.

† "Sartor Resartus," p. 146.

## Christ in English Literature

something that we may have in its stead? "Sufficiently, most respected Herr von Voltaire, hast thou demonstrated this proposition, considerable or otherwise; that the mythus of Christian religion looks not in the eighteenth century as it did in the eighth. . . . Wilt thou help us to embody that Religion in a new mythus, in a new vehicle and vesture, that our souls otherwise too like perishing may live?"\* A large task this. Is Voltaire equal to it? Decidedly *not* equal in the opinion of the critic. Can any man essay it? "To 'teach' religion, the first thing needful and also the last and the only thing, is finding of a man who *has* religion."† And no man, as Carlyle saw men, *had* it. The fire had gone out and there was none to rekindle it! The seers were all dead. Religion had quite perished from the earth. This loss to Carlyle was staggering. In a moment of clearest vision he had written, "It is now known, what never needed proof or statement before, that Religion is not a doubt, that it is a certainty—or else a mockery and a horror. That none of all of the many things that we are in doubt about, and need to have demonstrated and rendered probable, can, by any alchemy, be made a 'Religion' for us; but are and must continue a baleful, quiet or un-

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\* "Sartor Resartus," p. 146. † "Miscellaneous Essays," p. 110.

## The Complaint of the Pessimist

conscious Hypocrisy for us; and bring—*Salvation*, do we fancy? I think it is another thing they will bring, and are, on all hands, visibly bringing this good while.”\*

Into what horror must he not have felt himself plunged when one by one he sees his faiths slipping from him! How far he had gone! No longer the close clinging to the dear belief in the revelation of God through Jesus of Nazareth, only a formless and unsubstantial Pantheistic vision. “Often, also, could I see the black tempest marching in anger through the Distance; round some Schreckhorn, as yet grim blue, would the eddying vapor gather, and then tumultuously eddy and flow down like a mad witch’s hair; till after a space it vanished, and in the clear sunbeams your Schreckhorn stood smiling grim white, for the vapor had held snow. How thou fermentest and elaboratest in thy great fermenting vat and laboratory of an atmosphere, of a world, O nature! Or, what is nature? Ha! why do I not name thee, God?”† How far is Schreckhorn from Calvary! There was no help from Schreckhorn, and life, robbed of all its faith-props, became literally unsupportable. Religion is not in doubt, religion is in faith, and faith he had none. Further and yet further

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\* “Life of Sterling,” p. 94. † “Sartor Resartus,” p. 142.

## Christ in English Literature

the skies receded from him and the vanishing heavens were followed by his bitter cries. Titanic is the figure that stretches out its accusing finger toward the stars. Only a moment and the Titan sinks down—his rage all spent in pitiableness and tragicalest distress. He no longer curses. He moans. Mr. Froude, standing by his bedside remarked, "I cannot believe in a God who does nothing." The words were caught up by the dying man and in a pathetic undertone, with sorrowfulest shake of the head he continued, "He does nothing, nothing." He is as a shipwrecked man, clinging in mid-ocean to a spar. In his ears the growl of the waters; on his eyes the black of the night; in his heart the chill of death; in all the dark clouds above no rift; on all that wide, un pitying sea, no gleam of rescuing sail. No help. "He does nothing." And yet he had once believed that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life."

In this same distressful category is John Stuart Mill to be placed, and yet with a difference. With Carlyle and George Eliot pessimism was an effect, with Mill a cause. To the former, pessimism seems to come as a consequence of their loss of faith; with Mill it is the determining cause of his belieflessness.

## The Complaint of the Pessimist

Carlyle and George Eliot give up the Christ and find the world dark; Mill finds the world dark at his life's beginning and never beholds the Christ. That Mill is one of the most depressing of pessimists is not to be questioned, depressing because of his evident sincerity and the assurance that this dolorous creed is the child of his reason and not the petulant outcry of a transient mood. Is it a matter of wonder that Mill did not find the Christ and at best could see only in Jesus of Nazareth a man of great genius and the embodiment of many virtues? Consider his training. His father was a skeptic and so aggressive in his skepticism that all his agnosticisms were instilled into the mind of his boy while he was yet of tender years. He not only held that supernatural religion was false, but that it was hurtful, not only a superstition, but a menace. Christianity was to him specially noxious. The "*ne plus* ultra of wickedness he considered to be embodied in what is commonly presented to mankind as the creed of Christianity." \* This creed, with all its hopes, he scornfully swept aside and would not so much as have it seriously considered by his gifted child. And so Mill grows up without any religious training whatever. "I am thus," he declares, "one of the very few examples in this country of one who has not

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\* "Autobiography," p. 45.

## Christ in English Literature

thrown off religious beliefs, but never had it; I grew up in a negative state with regard to it. I looked upon the modern exactly as I did upon the ancient religion, as something which in no way concerned me." \*

There is no hint that at any time in his formative years he gave the Christian religion any serious consideration, having had the matter settled for him in advance by his father and seeing in the religion of Jesus nothing different from the religions of Greece or Rome. As his religion so his philosophy seems to have been given him by his father, and having accepted the creed of the fatalist there awaited him in all his interpretations of the universe and its life only emptiness and sorrow. Nowhere did he see goodness or the triumph of love. Upon nature, which Butler had glorified by his largeness of interpretation, he turns with savage fury. He sees no good in it. Nature is not kind; it is cruel. Nature gives no hint of the saint; it is satanic. The examples set by nature are criminal, its inspirations diabolical. "In sober truth nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another, are nature's every day performances. Killing, the most criminal act, as recognized by human laws, nature does to every being that lives, and in a large proportion of cases, after protracted tor-

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\* "Autobiography," p. 43.

## The Complaint of the Pessimist

tures, such as only the greatest monsters whom we read of ever purposely inflicted on their fellow creatures. Nature impales men, breaks them as if on the wheel, burns them to death, crushes them with stones and has other hideous deaths in reserve, such as no ingenious cruelty of a Domitian ever surpassed.”\* It is no matter of surprise, after such a deliverance, that he should declare that “the scheme of nature regarded in its whole extent cannot have had for its role, or even principal object, the good of human or other sentient beings.”† So does evil dwarf the good that Mill, even as his father, holds that God, if he be all powerful, cannot be justified in this wickedness, and would fain escape from the horror of it all through the thought that the Deity is limited in his power, and this awful wrongdoing of the universe beyond his control. Now it is quite evident that there is nowhere room in such a philosophy for the Christ. This powerless Deity ill accords with the Christ vision of the Divine All Sufficiency; this indifferent Deity, as he is elsewhere pictured, with the Father love of which Jesus spoke. If nature is malign, if it exists but to crush, what emptiness the words, “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!” To one upon whose eye-

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\* “Essays.” † “Essays.”

## Christ in English Literature

balls presses so close the night that he declares that "not annihilation but immortality may be the burdensome idea," what mockery in the approach of one whose burden ever is, "I am come that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly!"

Yet even to Mill, with his youth-ingrained antipathies, the Christ was not altogether unappealing. Forced by his very philosophy to deny the claims of Jesus, he yet testifies most nobly to the worth and glory of Christ's humanity.

"Whatever," he says, "may be taken from us by rational criticism, Christ is still left—a unique figure not more unlike all his predecessors than his successors . . . in the first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast."\* Opposed to all religions save the religion of humanity, holding the beliefs in supernatural revelations and the fantastic ideals springing therefrom an embarrassment and a hindrance to rational systems and rational motives of conduct, our philosopher yet admits that if we *must* have a "religion" we have not made "a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity."

"He is only a utilitarian," as one of his eulogists declares. "He believes in no inspi-

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\* "Essays."

## The Complaint of the Pessimist

ration but that of experience. He had no other creed or dogma or gospel than Bentham's axiom, 'The greatest happiness to the greatest number,'''\* and yet, looking in his later years upon the serene beauty of the Christ, he is moved to say, that Jesus was charged with a unique and special commission from God to lead mankind into the paths of truth and virtue, and that even now it would "not be easy for an unbeliever to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavor so to live that Christ would approve his life."† But further than this he does not go, and though his life was filled with outward successes, there is nowhere any indication that ever he found peace and joy. His father, he declares, in his autobiography, did not know the name of happiness—nor did the son. This famed autobiography is one of the saddest of books. Mill thirsted for happiness. He was stoic as his father was. Beneath all his poise he carried a restless heart. This grave man was possessed by a great inquietude. He sought happiness, but found it not. At one time he comes to dejection and utter breakdown of soul. Though he rallies from this, and in poetry, music, art, human concerns, finds momentary relief, the ache remains. He buries his wife

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\* "John Stuart Mill"—A Memorial, p. 26. † "Essays."

## Christ in English Literature

and most pathetically buys a cottage near which she sleeps, and makes her memory a religion. "Her memory is to me a religion and her approbation the standard by which, summing up as it does all my unworthiness, I endeavor to regulate my life." \* His life has fallen into ruins, "But because I know she would have wished it I endeavor to make the best of what life I have left, and to work on with such diminishing strength as can be derived from the thoughts of her and communion with her memory." † Mark the words, "Communing with her *memory*." There is no communing with her *spirit*—*she* is no more. A cottage is beside her grave, but that grave is not angel-visited. A frail, aging man dwells near, communing with a memory, but the shadow lifts not to the words, "I am the resurrection and the life." The day is far spent. Unhoping an old man toils with "diminishing strength," nerved only by the bitter memory of a loss. He has no Christ for helper,—only the recollection of a woman's face he is never more to see. The eyes of the toiler are turned toward the west from which the long night shadows are even now coming up. He offers no prayer, prayer is a superstition, but his face is the face of one who longs for death. The dark creeps up the sky; it creeps into the old

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\* "Autobiography," p. 251. † *Ib.*, p. 241.

## The Complaint of the Pessimist

man's soul; the dark is everywhere. When  
will it lift? It will never lift. The day is  
dead.



ECHOES OF THE ORIENT

"Emerson, Carlyle, Clough, Matthew Arnold, J. A. Froude, Leslie Stephens, W. R. Gregg are all examples of men who take a more or less negative attitude with respect to the Christian history, the Christian virtues and the Christian affections. . . . That this skepticism is real and fundamental and most tenacious we cannot doubt. But we find reason to believe that it is not so hopelessly negative as the confessions and the occasional caustic and contemptuous denials of this class of writers would seem to imply. However much of commonly accepted religious truth these men fail to accept, they show most unmistakably that there is very much to which either as symbol or as fact they most tenaciously cleave and to which they attach a serious significance—so serious that without it the earth would be to them a waste, life a dream and man a contemptible enigma."—*Science and Sentiment* (Porter), p. 493.

## IX.

### ECHOES OF THE ORIENT.

THE far East again threatens an invasion of the West. Its philosophical mists have blown across the seas and seek to envelop the Occidental mind. Its religions, too, waking from the sleep of ages through idealized interpretations by new-world poets, seek admission to modern Pantheons. As for its poetry, its antique flavor has already commended itself to western palates, and through tempting sensual ripeness is almost a menace. To us moderns, furthermore, dazed by swift developments and the whirl and confusion of present day living, the changelessness of the East comes most appealingly, and in this nightmare of material progress we long for India's repose. Then, too, and above all, the Past, with its silences, its immensities, its mysteries, wakes within us all a veneration that with but little persuasion would kneel and adore. And the far East stands for that Past.

Foremost among the men of letters, who have succumbed to this fascination is Ralph Waldo Emerson. Born in Boston, he should have been born in Benares. He is more Hindoo than American. Cultured in new world

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schools, he leaned from the first to old world sentiment, and substituted, even while in college, dreaming for thinking. A somewhat he owed to Germany, but even more profound than the spell of Hegel was the spell of the East. Its poetry appealed to him and the name of Sadi, the Persian, is of all names oft-est upon his lips. The religions of the Orient shone fair upon him, and he thought them beautiful and ennobling. He is ever quoting from their sacred books, ever commending their sanity and imperishableness and can most fittingly conclude a grave discourse on Immortality with a long extract from the Vedas. Oriental philosophy, so far as he was able to apprehend it, he seems to have gulped down in whole. These philosophic importations give to his literary wares a quaintness and distinction which have, no doubt, made for their wider popularity. A Bagdad brand would lift even inferior goods into notoriety at least, if not into favor. And though his head was pillowed in Indian groves, Emerson, it should not be forgotten, had a New England ancestry, and was therefore by no means ignorant of the commercial value of this Orientalism. That he was under this sway of the East no careful reader of him can for a moment deny. Mr. W. T. Harris, a competent critic, has declared his poem, "Brah-

## Echoes of the Orient

ma," to be one of the finest epitomes of Indian philosophy extant. If it be thought that no Western critic has a right to pronouncement on such recondite themes, let us hear from a cultured Indian, Mr. Protap Chunder Mozoomdar. This notable poet and scholar declares that of all the men of his generation, Emerson has most inclined to the East, and in labored analysis, Mr. Mozoomdar shows the identity of Concord and Hindoo philosophy. Even the face of Emerson reminds him of the Orient. "I do not know why, but as often as I study his features, even in the imperfect photograph I possess, the idea of 'Nirvana,' as taught by the great Sakya Muni, suffuses my soul. There is that hushed, ineffable, self-contained calmness over his countenance so familiar to us who have studied the expression of Gautama's image in every posture." \* If Emerson did not accept in most thorough-going way the Pantheistic philosophy these words are indeed without meaning. If, going beyond the Christian Pantheism of Paul, he did not identify God with the All and sink all individual lives in this Allness, then language is not merely a puzzle, but an affront. Take this: "I became a transparent eyeball. I am nothing; I see all; the currents of universal being circulate through me. I am part or parcel of God." And this: "Ineffable

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\* "Genius and Character of Emerson," p. 371.

## Christ in English Literature

is the union of God and man in every act of the soul. The simplest person who in his integrity worships God is God."\* So strong is this drawing that he will not, even in conventional way, refer to the Deity as a person. He prefers to speak of God as "Fate," "The Oversoul," "The All," "The Absolute." Yet he does not lack courage. He speaks of the impersonal because he believes in the impersonal. "I say that I cannot find when I explore my own consciousness any truth in saying that God is a person, but the reverse. I feel that there is some profanation in saying he is personal."† Now, it is quite obvious that this Pantheistic scheme as understood and unfolded by Emerson, is wholly inconsistent with Christianity. There is no room in such a scheme for the Nazarene.

Quite early in life did the choice come to Emerson. Of Puritan stock and with clerical environment and traditions, Emerson entered the pulpit. But from the first it was quite evident that whatever the beauty of the preacher's life, he was, nevertheless, far from being a preacher of Christ. Even the Unitarians were alarmed by his boldness. The break with his church came over his refusal to further observe the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. "I choose," he said, "that my remembrance of

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\* "The Oversoul." † "A Memoir" (Cabot), Vol. I., p. 341.

## Echoes of the Orient

Him should be pleasing, affecting, religious. I will love him as a glorified friend after the free way of friendship and not pay him a stiff sign of respect as men do them whom they fear.' '\*

His objection, then, was not to the *form*, for an artist instinct ever saved him from an undervaluation of form; he objected because his haughty spirit brooked not the payment of a "stiff sign of respect" to one whom we would meet in the way of comradeship and friendliness. Loosed from his church moorings, he is all the freer in his words concerning the Christ. From the outset the poet seemed to resent the large and commanding place given to the person of Jesus. It is true that at one moment he writes, "It is not good to say with too much emphasis that we are encroached upon by the claims of Jesus in our current theology." † But this is not his prevailing tone. More than any other writer of his day does he resist this encroachment.

The exact attitude of Emerson toward the Christ is difficult of statement, difficult by reason of the poet's inharmonious opinions and pronouncements on this great theme. Here, as elsewhere, he abhors consistency and flings his clashing estimates full in the world's face with almost a contemptuous unconcern. What has this Son of Heaven to do with logic?

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\* "Discourse on Lord's Supper." † "Journal," 1838.  
(12) 177

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Why should this oracle in the deliverance of the to-day be regardful of the responses on the yesterdays? "I hate preaching," he declares, "whether in pulpit or teachers' meeting. Preaching is a pledge, and I wish to say what I feel and think to-day with the proviso that to-morrow, perhaps, I shall contradict it all." \* Very well, but a little more of intellectual humility and a little less of the oracular would be quite becoming one who beforehand gives warning of the fallibility of his utterance. Yet we go beyond the book in this expectation, and unexplained and unexplainable contradictions of statements lie thick on Emerson's golden page.

On the whole, however, if one may venture to interpret the seer, it can be said with absolute certainty, that from the believer's view point, no singer of our day has more grossly blundered in his interpretation of Christianity, and a plentiful lack of appreciation of the very genius of the Nazarene was Ralph Waldo Emerson's. To be sure he has not failed to say many fine words on this theme. He is gracious enough to declare that the name of Jesus "is not so much written as ploughed into the world"; that "Jesus always speaks from within and in a degree that transcends all others"; and he almost fancies that his is

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\* "A Memoir," Vol. I., p. 329.

## Echoes of the Orient

a special brief for the Nazarene's defense. But when we go back of these rhetorical outworks we find a misunderstanding of Jesus that is no more a sorrow than a surprise.

This misunderstanding is all inclusive and vitiates wholly all his words on the Christ theme. It is not a doctrinal slip, but a fault of vision; it concerns not the doctrines, but the person of Christ. For Emerson's is the stupendous mistake of divorcing the ethical from the personal in Christianity. The doctrines of Jesus he prizes, the person of Jesus he declares is too much with us. In this divorcement, this holding to the teachings of Jesus in their unrelatedness, he holds himself superior to orthodox expositions and defenders. "I believe the Christian religion to be perfectly true—true to an extent that those who are styled its 'most orthodox defenders' have never, or but in rarest glimpses, once or twice in a lifetime reached. *I am for the principles, they are for the men.*" \* The whole front of his offending here is in this declaration, "Whoever would preach Christ in these times must say nothing about him." † Now, in this single sentence is Emerson's vital mistake in interpretation bodied forth. Could any man go further afield in exposition? How could it have escaped him that Christianity was first of

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\* "The Preacher." † "The Preacher."

## Christ in English Literature

all and last of all founded on the Person of Jesus? How could he have missed seeing the emphasis put by the Nazarene himself upon his person? How could he but know that upon the Person of Jesus the church was builded, and that of all the truths of the Christian religion those of the incarnation and resurrection were most far-reaching? How could he have closed his ears to the words of the Teacher as in all his earth ministry he invited men, not to an acceptance of dogma or ethical system, but to a supreme love and trust in him?

It is not denied that this sage of Concord lays enduring stress upon the ethics of Jesus. "If I understand the distinction of Christianity, the reason why it is to be preferred over all other systems and is divine, is this, that it is a moral system." \* Yet this is to miss the interpretation altogether, and passing strange is it that Emerson should have believed that these doctrines unvitalized by the Person of Jesus, had life and health for men. Tennyson declared that the doctrines of Jesus, unmanned by his personality, would be too weak to stand the strain of world-life, knew that apart from Him they were but words; but Emerson not only missed this knowledge, but held that "the assumption of honor to Jesus in the new theology, betrayed a want of faith in his doc-

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\* "The Lord's Supper."

## Echoes of the Orient

trine.”\* By what logic he would buttress such belief and the kindred statement that “to ignore Christ’s official authority, is the recognition of his real and living authority,” by no means appears. Not even Hindoo legerdemain and the hocus pocus of a sublimated transcendentalism, seem equal to the task.

If, mindless of our disappointment in this huge primary misconception, we pass on, it is to find the poet under the compulsions of Hindoo dreams antagonizing all or nearly all of the fundamental truths in the Christian religion.

This comer from Benares could in no wise accept the dogma of Christ’s divinity. Jesus was divine, but only as all men are divine. He was teacher, poet, seer, yet such was Plato, was Confucius, was Buddha. The mission of Jesus was not unique. His doctrines may be paralleled. He is only a teacher, not *the* Teacher. “Do not degrade the life and dialogue of Christ by insulation and peculiarity.” The Nazarene is but one in a glorious company. The incarnation was fable and also hint: “To Emerson the fact that was imaged in Christ’s divinity is the infinitude of man’s nature, the boundless inspiration that opens to him as he opens himself to receive it.”† Had he a power possessed by no other, a supernatural power? Could he work miracles?

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\* “A Memoir,” Vol. I., p. 316.      † *Ib.*, Vol. I., p. 312.

## Christ in English Literature

Here we are thrown into a typical bog of Emersonian contradiction. One time he writes, "With regard to the miracles of Jesus I suppose he wrought them," and in the following sentence declares, "A miracle is a patch, an afterthought." \* Elsewhere he also declares: "The word 'miracle,' as pronounced by Christian churches, gives a false impression. It is a monster. It is not one with the blowing clover and the falling rain." Had the Christ supernatural power? Did he work miracles? Nay, miracles "are not one with the blowing clover and the falling rain."

Whence, then, the mastership of Jesus? It is not in his Person, it is not in his miracles. Is it in his teachings? Examine the great doctrines of Jesus and see how Emerson contradicts them. Jesus taught the personality of God. Emerson, as we have seen, declares, "I cannot find any truth in saying that God is a person, but the reverse."

Consider the doctrine of prayer. Jesus prayed. He taught his disciples to pray. A prayerless Christian is a monstrosity. Says Emerson: "The dullards pray, the geniuses are light mockers." God stoops not to hear us. The heavens are rigid and unbending. "No God will help. . . . We cannot bring the heavenly powers to us. . . . It is a peremptory

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\* "Journal," p. 39.

## Echoes of the Orient

rule with them that *they never go out of their road.*” \*

Take the doctrine of sin. The Christ laid emphasis upon the eternal distinction between good and evil. Preaches Emerson, “Good and bad are but names readily transferable to this or that.” †

Neither in the Christ doctrine of a personal immortality does he find room and rest. Here, as elsewhere, he is Pantheistic, unsatisfactory, vague. He teaches immortality, but it is the immortality of principles, of qualities. To the thought of death to the individual as the door into a larger life, he seems a stranger. He walks dejectedly away from his brother’s grave, saying, “Death is a prodigious blunder.” His child dies and in tenderest threnody he sings—

“The Deep Heart answered, ‘weepest thou?’  
Worthier cause for sorrow wild,  
If I had not taken the child  
My servant Death with salving rite,  
Pours finite into the infinite.  
What is excellent,  
As God lives is permanent;  
Hearts are dust, heart’s loves remain,  
Heart’s love will meet thee again,  
House and tenant go to ground,  
Lost in God in Godhead found.”

Yet, is there comfort in this? Is it consolation to know that only love abides, that the “finite

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\* “Civilization.” † “Self Reliance.”

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is poured into the infinite," that the loved one is "in the Godhead found?" Is this dreary, impersonal immortality balm for bruised spirits? But the wonder grows. Emerson would not only substitute this doctrine for the heartening words of the Christ, but boldly declares that Jesus is no preacher of personal immortality. "It is strange that Jesus is esteemed by mankind the bringer of the doctrine of immortality. He is never once weak or sentimental; he is very abstemious of explanation, he never preaches the personal immortality; whilst Plato and Cicero had both allowed themselves to overstep the stern limits of the picture and gratify the people with that picture."\*

It is not worth while to contest the ground with such a disputant. This astounding statement is without excuse. It is supported by no reputable authority, no serious exegesis, no historical argument; supported only by the disjointed oracularism of a Concord dreamer, the gentleman from Benares. What means the poet, then, when dropping into the adulatory vein he writes: "An era in human history is the life of Jesus; and the immense influence for good leaves all the perversion and superstition almost harmless. Mankind has been subdued to the acceptance of his doctrine and cannot spare the benefit of so pure a servant of truth

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\* "Immortality."

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and love.”\* “Subdued” by the “acceptance” of what “doctrine?” Have we not seen the Emersonian denial of the fundamental doctrines of Jesus? Is not this mere commonplace and emptiness? What, then, is the secret of this mastership? let us insist. It is not in his person; this Emerson would have us silent on. It is not his miracles, “A miracle is a monstrosity.” It is not in his doctrines; these are to be set aside.

How account, then, for this tremendous leverage and power of the Nazarene, the unparalleled enthusiasm of his first disciples and the love that went singing unto its death? It is a hard answer he gives us. “People forget that it is the eye which makes the horizon, and the rounding of the mind’s eye makes this or that man a type or representative of humanity with the name of hero or saint. Jesus, ‘the providential man,’ is a good man, on whom many people are agreed that these laws of optical delusion shall take effect.”† There you have it plump. The saint is created by the rounding of the eye, and concerning Jesus of Nazareth the world has been duped by an optical delusion!

It may seem a far cry from Emerson to Wordsworth, but sharp as are the contrasts between these geniuses, they yet find kinship and

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\* “The Preacher.” † “Experience.”

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affinity in the dreams of the Orient, and of the two, Wordsworth is the more closely linked to the Asian spirit. Emerson's Orientalism seems to be put on from without, coming through the study of German idealism and the tropical literature of the East; Wordsworth's transcendentalisms are inbreathed. From books and reasoned systems he drew little; his knowledge or his dream was first hand and original. In his very boyhood he was an idealist after Berkeley's own heart. Speaking of himself at that age he says: "I was often unable to think of external things as having an external existence, and I communed with all I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from the abyss of idealism to the reality. At that time I was afraid of such processes. In later life I have deplored, as we all have reason to do, a subjugation of an opposite character, and have rejoiced over these remembrances." No need had this dreaming boy of Eastern fantasy in books, for even into the moist mist valley of his childhood had these fantasies come through the unhindering gates of his own reveries.

For logic, reasoning and piled up argumentation, Wordsworth cared nothing. He held the rather to intuition and imagination. These

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were the "Open Sesame" to all knowledge. Too much emphasis he felt was placed upon the *energy*, the activity of the mind, too little on wise passivity and receptiveness. It is not for the soul to go here and there in search of knowledge; let the soul be but a faithful mirror—

"Think not, 'mid all this mighty sun,  
Of things forever speaking,  
That nothing in itself will come  
But we must still be seeking."

Be still. Say not, let us go, too, and investigate; say, let us give ear to what the universal spirit is saying. So waits the soul upon the message that the very body is passive, well-nigh dead, and we come to

"That serene and blessed mood  
In which the affections guilty lead us on,  
Until the breath of this corporeal frame,  
And even the motion of our human blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul;  
While with an eye made quiet with the power  
Of harmony and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things." \*

If aught else were needed to show the essential Orientalism of Wordsworth it might be found in his advocacy of the doctrine of reincarnation, dear to the eastern mind. This dream colored much of his thought. The soul, he holds, was existent before our birth. His

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\* Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey.

## Christ in English Literature

poems are the poetical latter-day rendering of the Phaedo:—

“Then we must have acquired the knowledge of the ideal at some time previous to this?”

“Yes.”

“That is to say, before we were born, I suppose?”

“True.”

“And if we acquired this knowledge before we were born, and born having it, then we also knew before we were born, and at the instant of birth not only the equal or the greater or the less, but all other ideas; for we are not speaking only of equality absolute; but of beauty; good, justice, holiness, and all which we stamp with the name of essence in the dialectical process, when we ask and answer questions. Of all this we may affirm that we acquired the knowledge before birth?”

“That is true.” \*

Now turn to Wordsworth—

“Our birth is but a step and a forgetting;  
The soul that rises with us, our life's star,  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar:  
Not in entire forgetfulness  
Nor yet in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God who is our home.”

And again—

“O joy that in our embers  
Is something that doth live,  
That nature yet remembers  
What was so fugitive!”

Above all things else is he thankful—

“For those first affections,  
Those shadowy recollections  
Which, be they what they may,  
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,  
Are yet the master-light of all our seeing.”

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\* “Dialogues of Plato-Jowett,” Vol. I., p. 403.

## Echoes of the Orient

And that—

“Though inland far we be  
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea  
Which brought us hither.”

Now, it goes without the saying, that this thorough commitment to eastern philosophy must have exercised a profound influence on Wordsworth's thought of Christ.

It is obvious that this conception of nature as the revelation of God must, to some extent, shape his view of the incarnation and the revelation of God through Jesus of Nazareth. We may acquit the poet of the charge of Pantheism if by Pantheism is meant an impersonal God, and the absolute identification of the Deity with nature, yet find in his hymn-celebrations of nature as the sufficient revelation of God a necessary implication of the inutility of a further revelation in Christ. Thanking him as we do for his unwearying insistence upon the immanence of God in his creation, may we not justly affirm that Wordsworth's gospel of the religiousness of nature and the fullness of its voices would tend to close men's eyes to the vision of the Nazarene? If nature's stars are all so bright, why look we for the Star of Bethlehem?

When from the narrow view of nature as a thing mechanical, extern, soulless, he indig-  
nantly revolts, we enlist beneath his banner,

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claiming as our very own his words,—

“Great God! I’d rather be  
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn;  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.”

Thus far we follow. The universe is not bereft of the divine presence. It was the Christian Paul who said, “In Him we live and move and have our being.” Nature is palpitant with the divine indwelling—

“For I have learned  
To look on nature not as in the hour  
Of the thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes  
The still, sad music of humanity,  
Not harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky and in the mind of man;  
A motion and a spirit that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.” \*

But we will not further go. Taking Wordsworth’s two greatest poems, “The Excursion” and “Tintern Abbey,” and it is not too much to say that the poet finds therein fullness in nature’s revelation of God, and there is possible for him no passionate craving for an ampler revelation in Christ.

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\* “Tintern Abbey.”

## Echoes of the Orient

Nor could he have felt to the full the need of Christ's redemptive ministry. Nature is sanative, is salvational. In nature is there medication for all the wounds of the soul. For Gilead's balm there is no need; he is

"Well pleased to recognize  
In nature and the language of the sense,  
The anchor of my purest thoughts; the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my being,"\*

And in "The Excursion" the Solitary is bidden to commune with nature and find therein the healing for all life's hurts. Nor can we fail to see that Wordsworth's theory of pre-existence was bound to affect his attitude toward the Christ as the revealer of immortality and the apologetic value of Christ's resurrection.

That much of this drift was unconscious, we cannot doubt. It is equally in evidence that it was almost wholly checked before the poet's death. With maturing knowledge and the weight of cares he came to realize nature's limitations and its silences, and in his latest writings we find poems more distinctively Christian. As Principal Shairp has well put it: "As life went on with Wordsworth the visionary gleam grew dimmer and the moral faith grew stronger, so that his later poems contain less of that mystical feeling about

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\* "Tintern Abbey."

## Christ in English Literature

nature which is the peculiar charm of the earlier ones, but more recognition of those truths by which conscience lives and which Christianity reveals. That he has not clearly bridged over the chasm, has not fully harmonized the earlier with the later feeling, must be admitted.”\* Yet, though he failed in bridging the chasm, it is assuring to know that he is ever narrowing it, ever coming closer at the last to the Christ. Emerson, in his advancing years, fares ever further into the Orient. Wordsworth comes back to his own. In his earlier years he sought only communion with nature, but in the closing days another communion he found sweeter and more satisfying. Three days before the end, his son asking him whether he would receive the communion, he replied, “That is just what I want.”

In the crisis of his living let us bear in mind it was not the earth “and common face of nature” that spake to him “rememberable things”; the words then that went to his soul’s soul were from the lips of the Great Teacher.

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\*“Studies in Poetry and Philosophy” (Prin. Shairp), p. 85.

## THE VISION

"A man's value depends upon the proportion of religious sentiment which he has carried away with him from his early education and which perfumes his whole life."—*Preface to Recollections and Letters of Ernest Renan*.

"What if keen blasts more often blow in upon us than soft, refreshing gales from these peripheral limiting regions of our existence provided that within the inner region of our own creating there glows a larger central warmth? If our scheme of happiness is itself realizable, if we are really able to build up our own inner world of fair possession and glad opportunity, it must surely matter but little whether this outer which our will cannot touch must be pronounced on the whole a slight excess of evil or of good."—*Pessimism (James Sully)*, p. 341.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE VISION.

MANY have seen the vision. While travelers here and there have never climbed above the mist-veiled foothills, and a few loud-crying ones proclaim that there is no mountain peak at all toward which the glory surges, a great multitude has pressed above the mist and beheld the glory.

The literature of belief is large and varied and by far the most considerable of our times. If in this search for varying view-points and multiform interpretations of the Christ-story we have listened overlong to the voices of the unseeing it should not be to forget that more and richer are the voices of faith. All modern literatures through which runs the note unbelieving bulk small in comparison with this literature which comes down from the mount. To compass it were a task impossible. This faith finds expression in the histories of a Motley, a Macaulay, a Bancroft; in the essays of a Whipple, a Hare, a Lamb; in the State papers of a Washington, a Gladstone, a Lincoln; in the orations of a Burke, a Webster, a Clay; in the art criticisms of a Ruskin and a Reynolds; in the travel records of a Livingstone and a Stanley; in the sermons of a Liddon and a Brooks;

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in the poetry of a Tennyson and a Whittier—in a line, in the great and enduring literature of our day.

Nor can any man blink the fact that this literature of belief is the literature that forwards man. The plaint of the pessimist depresses; the *hardness* of a belated paganism hurts; the transcendentalisms of the Orient befog; the pictures of unredemptive ideals discourage; the Sighs of "Il Penseroso" cast down; in the Voices of Revolt is there the creep of despair. The literature of denial and the literature of doubt lack constructive force. They undermine foundations, but they build no temples. To the majority of men incapable of grasping the sublimated ideals of the elect few, they come as dire destructionists. The literature of power is the literature of belief. It is faith and faith only that can remove mountains, whether in Scripture promise or in the real life of the world. The Christ is a present-day dynamic. He and he only is creator, whether of worlds or of character. The Spirit that in the Hebrew vision brooded in the beginning over the forming world must brood over the forming life of the to-day, or else, and forever—chaos. Wherever there is a Bethlehem, there men dare to hope; wherever the blackening cross of Calvary swings its shadow arms, there does a stricken humanity dare to

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dream of redemption through miracle of anguished love. The Christ literature—the literature that *feels* him, the literature bearing at the heart of it a great dream, a great passion and a great hope—is the literature that puts iron in men's blood, grasp in men's hands, brotherliness in men's faces—life, and yet more abundant life, in the stead of a diminishing vitality.

Splendid representative of this literature is Alfred Tennyson, the greatest poet, as Poe holds, of all the centuries. Tennyson believed in Christ, and in heartening contrast to many of the minor singers of his time stands his work. A believer, and yet his faith cannot be put into a definition. You can no more draw lines around it than around love itself. It is vast and vague; it is shadowy and elusive. It cannot be codified or catalogued in set terms. The attempt at definition made by the poet himself is disappointing and incomplete. Says Mr. Knowles, "He formulated once and quite deliberately his own religious creed in the words, 'There is a something that watches over us; and our own individuality endures; that's my faith and that's all my faith.' "

But the definition does not satisfy us. It is *not* all his faith, as a study of his work discloses. He, finest fibred of all men, and sensitive, was always averse to dogmatic pronounci-

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ations and none the less to what seemed to him was not to be borne, the revelation in formal, assertive way of the heart's dear dreams and hopes. "Go to 'In Memoriam,'" he was wont to say to those who inquired of him as to his attitude toward Christ, "you'll find it all there." To "In Memoriam," then, and to other heart-songs, let us go for illumination. And there we find—faith. Tennyson believed in the Christ and his faith is the more valuable because it is a faith won through struggle. He felt the force of the objections made to Christianity. He was, as Mr. Ward says, keenly "sensitive to the intellectual conditions of his time," and all its vague unrest, its resolute iconoclasms, its dreary skepticisms he felt. Doubts sprang up. He did not shut his eyes to them. He fought them and he won. Through anxious searchings he came to the repose of faith. The current materialism of his day he loathed. "Spirit," he declares, "seems to me to be the reality of the world." Yet his faith was neither a vague Pantheism nor impersonally ethical. That he was not a Pantheist his stout affirmations of a *personal* immortality abundantly prove. *He* was not to be swallowed up at last into the All. *He* was to endure. He stoutly affirmed the utter helplessness of the Christian religion without the *person* of Jesus. Again and again in his heart-talks

## The Vision

with his son, as we see in his incomparable Memoirs, he declares that the ethics of Jesus can never be divorced from the person of Jesus, and that not through the doctrines of the Nazarene, but through the Living Christ the world is to be saved.\* He lived and died in the Established Church, loyal to the end, joining with his family on the Sunday previous to his last departure from Scarringford in the celebration of the Holy Supper. Death draws near. To the Doctor, "Death?" Receiving an affirmative answer, he simply said, "It is well," and the son, standing by the bedside spoke his own prayer, "God accept him, Christ receive him."† This recital would by no means carry with it the implication that to all the creedal forms of that church he gave assent. Far from it. Against dogma he ever chafed, and the boundaries of the church he often overleaped—

"O, God, I cannot help it, but at times  
They seem too narrow, all the faiths  
Of this grown world of ours, whose baby eyes  
Saw them sufficient."

Truth is large, but our conceptions of it are narrow and incomplete. The Christ may not be comprehended but he may be trusted—

"Strong Son of God, immortal love,  
Whom we that have not seen thy face  
By faith and faith alone embrace,  
Believing where we cannot prove.

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\* "Memoirs," Vol. I., pp. 308, 326. † "Ib., Vol. II., p. 428.

## Christ in English Literature

"Thou seemest human and divine;  
The highest, holiest manhood thou;  
Our wills are ours we know not how,  
Our wills are ours to make them thine."\*

If there are those who believe that the expression, "strong Son of God," is merely poetical, and no voice of faith, they would do well to turn to his Memoirs. In answer to the inquiry as to the exact meaning of this phrase in his usage, he says that he uses it in the same sense in which it occurs in I. John, fourth chapter.† In that chapter we read: "Herein was the love of God manifested in us, that God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him."

Into a knowledge of the Son we shall come more and more. All present understandings of him are inadequate and passing—

"Our little systems have their day,  
They have their day and cease to be:  
They are but broken lights of thee,  
And thou, O Lord, art more than they."‡

It has been held that Tennyson came to Christ along the way of the evolutionary faith; that he was a thorough-going Darwinian; that this philosophy sounding forth unconsciously in "Locksley Hall," may be heard in all his music; that to him the world is yet in the making through evolutionary forces which,

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\* "In Memoriam." † Ib., Vol. I., p. 312. ‡ Ib.,

## The Vision

however, do not shut out God, and that in a strictly scientific sense he speaks of—

“That one far-off divine event  
To which the whole creation moves”;

that to the laureate Christ was the logical and necessary sequence of this process, the final product of Almighty Love. Upon the surface the contention seems well founded. Conclusive seem these lines—

“Is there evil but on earth? Or pain in every peopled sphere,  
Well be grateful for the sounding watchword, Evolution, here,  
Evolution ever climbing after some ideal good.”

Man is ever ascending—

“I have climbed the snows of Age and I gazed at a field in the  
Past,  
When I sank with the body at times in the slough of a low  
desire,  
But I hear no yelp of the beast and the Man is quiet at last,  
As he stands on the heights of his life with a glimpse of a life  
that is higher.” \*

And that “higher life” of which the gracious glimpse is given at last, has already been realized through this evolution, “ever climbing after some ideal good,” in the Man of Galilee.

It would seem, however, that Tennyson uses the word “evolution” only in its large meanings and outlooks and as close akin to the triter word, “progress.” Darwinianism, in its strictly scientific and technical sense, he hardly seems to understand, at least would, in no wise, con-

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\* “By an Evolutionist.”

## Christ in English Literature

struct into a philosophy. It may be felicitous phrasing, that Tennyson was "a believer in evolution with idealistic interpretation"; but the homelier statement sets forth the same truth, that the poet believed in progress as divine. The world must go on—

"Call me, rather, silent voices,  
Forward to the starry track,  
Glimmering up the heights beyond me  
On and always on."

But the world goes on through the *divine* ordering and superintendence—

"This firm old world of ours is but a child  
Yet in the go cart, Patience! Give it time  
To learn its limits; *there is a Hand that guides.*"

Now, the ultimate goal of all progress, he held, was love, and the supreme expression of love was in the incarnate Lord. He was the Crown of all world and race development. And the world's further progress is toward the Christ. The upward way points toward Bethlehem. In his earliest days with vibrant voice he sings—

"Ring in the valiant man, free  
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;  
Ring out the darkness of the land,  
Ring in the Christ that is to be."\*

And in almost his last work he cries—

"Follow you the star that lights a desert pathway, yours or mine,  
Forward till you see the highest human nature is divine.  
Follow light and do the right, for man can half control his doom,  
Till you see the deathless angel seated in the vacant tomb."†

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\* "In Memoriam." † "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After."

## The Vision

In marked contrast with the academician, Tennyson, is the Quaker, Whittier; a contrast not simply in culture and form of work, but in faith and the ways leading thereto. If Tennyson's faith lacked positiveness, not so did Whittier's; if the poet laureate speaks not always with certainty, the Quaker's words sound clear. Of Tennyson's broodings and questionings and agonized doubtings, the American poet seems never to have known. Tennyson was essentially a reflective poet, the summing up in vocal utterance of the finest culture of his age. Mr. Matthew Arnold, writing to his mother, says, "My poems represent, on the whole, the main movement of the mind of the last quarter of a century, and they will probably have their day." With more of truth might Tennyson have made these words his own. Tennyson's is the work which bears upon it the stamp of the highest thought of his age—thought, which while finding its way at last toward the Christ, comes by devious and darksome ways and would distrust itself even in the triumphing moment of possession. Whittier's is the spontaneous, unstudied utterance, the—is it too much to say—unreflecting speech of nature, untroubled and at rest. Wondrously accordant this wild note of the American singer and the classical melody of England's wearer of the laurel. For both sing of Christ. The

## Christ in English Literature

American is the more orthodox. Whittier believed in the Christ, in prophecy, in shepherd's song and holy star and the angels guarding the tomb—blinking not any outcropping of the supernatural and the marvelous. In a single poem, as that on "The Crucifixion," there are enough orthodox beliefs to form a system. The poet speaks here of "the atoning hour," of a "sacrifice given for guilt," of the sheeted dead coming forth "to gaze upon a suffering God." Whittier believed in Christ—in the Christ of the Gospels—

"Deep strike thy roots, O heavenly Vine,  
Within our earthly sod,  
Most human and yet most divine,  
The flower of man and God." \*

No, this faith is not the faith of Tennyson, nor does he reach it in the same way. Does Tennyson come to Christ by the way of progress? Whittier comes by the way of the Eternal Goodness. The thought of God's goodness masters him. Everywhere does this love meet him. God is love. And that love is boundless—

"I walk with bared, hushed feet the ground  
Ye walk with boldness shod,  
I dare not fix with mete and bound  
The love and power of God." †

He sees the world's sorrow, feels its hurt—

"Yet in the madd'ning maze of things,  
Though tossed by storm and flood,

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\* "Our Master." † "The Eternal Goodness."

## The Vision

To one fixed stake my spirit clings,  
I know that God is good."\*

Questions of mighty import come to him and  
confused voices—

"I cannot learn  
Their great and solemn meanings nor discern  
The awful secrets of the eyes which turn  
Evermore on us through the day and night  
With silent challenge and a dumb demand,  
Proffering the riddles of the dread unknown,  
Like the calm sphinxes with their eyes of stone,  
Questioning the centuries from their veils of Sand!  
I have no answer for myself or thee  
Save that I learned beside my mother's knee,  
All is of God that is and is to be;  
And God is good."†

All else will pass away—

"The letter fails and systems fall  
And every symbol wanes;  
The Spirit brooding over all  
Eternal Love remains."‡

Through this abiding assurance in the goodness of God, faith in Christ is not only easy but necessary. If God be good, if God be love, this goodness must express itself; must come with tender way and speech to men. For love cannot be silent or self-contained; it must be vocal and communicative. There must be a revelation of this supreme love greater than is expressed in earth or sea or sky or prophet message or angel mission—God must speak through his Son. If God be love he cannot stay shut up in his high heaven

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\* "The Eternal Goodness." † "Ezekiel." ‡ "Our Master."

## Christ in English Literature

while the world is weighed down by its sins and weeping over new-made graves. Man's need is the imperative. Jehovah must hearken. So did Whittier love God, believing in God's infinite love that out of his own heart he could have digged that great Gospel, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish but have everlasting life."

One hesitates to speak of our greatest poet since Shakespeare, Robert Browning, and his undying faith in Christ. It seems almost hopeless, any attempt at exposition, in such limited space, of views so high and great; almost a profanation to dismiss with trivial word-comment a faith so measureless and profound.

Browning is, of all our singers, the bringer of strength and cheer to those who would believe, and the heartener of all who would live in the spirit. Though admittedly liberal in his theology, and departing not seldom from orthodox traditions, he is beyond all gainsaying, a Christian poet; Christian in his thought, Christian in his philosophy, Christian in his ideals, Christian in his utterances, Christian in his life. In the midst of a generation impoverished in spiritual thought, his gospels are very food and drink to hungry, thirsting souls. Dr. Berdoe calls him the "spiritual clothier" of the naked, wailing spir-

## The Vision

its of his age. In similar vein writes Mr. Cooke: "It may be said of Browning that he is essentially a Christian poet. . . . The grand conception of the world which Christianity presents, its lofty hopes and pure ideals, have become inwoven with the texture of his mind. Its spirit has penetrated his soul. Its history and its traditions, its life and mission of the Christ, its profound conception of Christianity as related to the unseen world, its struggle of man for spiritual attainments, have seemed to him worthy of the sincerest and noblest poetic treatment." \* But so ample is this treatment, so varied, that it fits not in the compass of this little book. In hurrying outlines only may it be presented.

Browning has a starting place—God. There are some truths he thinks it unnecessary to buttress with labored argumentation. Said one of the judges of the Supreme Court to the attorney who was wasting the hour in the proof of a proposition no jurist ever doubted, "Sir, there are some things the gentlemen of the United States Supreme Court are supposed to know."

"I find first  
Writ down for every A, B, C of fact  
In the beginning God made heaven and earth. †

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\* "Poets and Problems" (Cooke), p. 359.

† "The Ring and the Book."

## Christ in English Literature

He knows what God is—

“I knew, I felt (perception unexpressed,  
Uncomprehended by our narrower thought,  
But somehow, known and felt in every shift  
And change in the spirit—nay, in every pore  
Of the body even)—what God is, what we are,  
What life is—how God takes an infinite joy  
In infinite ways—one everlasting bliss,  
From whom all being emanates, all power proceeds.”\*

From such fullness of knowledge the world may slake its thirst. To the teacher who knows what God is and man and the meaning of human life, humanity will come with eager, expectant heart.

Question him as to his knowledge of God and he brings you straight to man—

“Though he is so bright and we are so dim,  
We are made in his image to witness him.”†

“God is the perfect poet,  
Who in creation acts out his own conceptions.”‡

But what knows he of Christ? Is he martyr, example, seer? Hear Mr. Cooke: “The Christ is not a mere Captain of salvation, but a realized explanation of all that God is to men in his infinite love and tenderness.”§ This, in a sentence, is the poet’s thought of Christ. To him love is the central thing in life, its inspiration and also its goal. There is nothing else besides. He sees only

“Love which on earth amid all the shows of it,  
Has ever been the sole good of life in it.”||

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\* “Paracelsus.” † “Christmas Eve.” ‡ “Paracelsus.”

§ “Poets and Problems” (Cooke), p. 359. || “Christmas Eve.”

## The Vision

Nothing counts but love, on earth, in heaven—

“For the loving worm within its clod  
Were diviner than a loveless God  
Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.” \*

But is there love in heaven, love in God?  
Clear sounding is the answer—

“From the first Power was, I knew;  
Life was made clear to me,  
That, strive but for closer view,  
Love were as plain.” †

As is God’s power boundless, so also is his  
love—

“For gazing up, in my youth at love  
As seen through power, ever above  
All modes which make it manifest,  
My soul brought to a single test—  
That, be the Eternal First and Last,  
Who in his power had so surpassed,  
All man conceives of what is mighty—  
Whose wisdom, too, showed infinite,  
Would prove as infinitely good.” ‡

But how could Browning harmonize this conception of goodness with the evil that surrounded him, the pain and the sorrow of the world? “The answer,” says Dr. Strong, “is that he saw the love of God so demonstrated in Christ Jesus that these seemingly opposed phenomena ceased to trouble him. I do not mean that he held to any of the orthodox formulas as to the person of our Lord. His faith was, doubtless, a very liberal one. But he did see

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\* “Christmas Eve.” † “Reverie in Asolando.”

‡ “Christmas Eve.”

## Christ in English Literature

in Christ the most effective revelation of God's love." \* The words are well chosen. Other revelations of God's love the poet sees, but its most "effective" revelation is in Christ.

"All at once I looked up with terror,  
He was there.  
He, himself, with his human air,  
: : : : the love of God." †

The All Great is the All Loving, as revealed in the Savior.

"This man so cured regards the curer then  
As—God forgive me—who but God himself,  
Creator and Sustainer of the world,  
That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile,  
The very God! Think, Ahib; dost thou think?  
So the All Great were the All Loving too!  
So through the thunder comes a human Voice  
Saying: O heart I made, a heart beats here!  
Face my hands fashioned, see it in myself!  
Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,  
But love I gave thee with Myself to love,  
And thou must love me who have died for thee." ‡

In this love is the harmonizing of all seeming contradictions, the solution of all the problems that weigh life down.

"I say the acknowledgment of God in Christ,  
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee  
All questions in the world and out of it." §

Browning's robust faith, however, does not exhaust itself in this broad acknowledgment. Not only does the Christ Person master him,

\* "The Great Poets and Their Theology" (Strong), p. 427.

† "Christmas Eve." ‡ "Karshish, the Arabian Physician."

§ "Death in the Desert."

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but the Christ doctrines as well. Take, for instance, the Christ doctrine of mastery through struggle. How the Master's strenuous words, "*Agonize* to enter in at the straight gate," are declared in Browning's song. This strenuous life he loves and exalts it by his praise—

"And so I live, you see,  
Go through the world, try, reprove, reject,  
Prefer, still struggling to effect  
My warfare! happy that I can  
Be crossed and thwarted as a man  
Not left in God's contempt apart  
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,  
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize." \*

Progress though struggle meant pain, but he is neither daunted nor cast down—

"Then welcome each rebuff  
That turns earth's smoothness rough,  
Each sting that bids nor sits, nor stand, but go!  
Be our joys three parts pain!  
Strive and hold cheap the strain;  
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe." †

Concordant, too, with the Christ revelation of immortality is the Browning message. Once, indeed, when dazed by the loss of a dear friend, does his faith seem to falter and "*La Saisiaz*" is tremulous with the breath of sighs; but that this passionate outburst and lament should be taken as his constant mood seems wholly indefensible. Somewhat surprising, then, are these words from Mrs. Orr: "The arguments set forth in "*La Saisiaz*," for the immortality of

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\* "Easter Day." † "Rabbi Ben Ezra."

## Christ in English Literature

of the soul leave no place for the idea, however indefinite, of a Christian revelation on the subject. Christ remained for Mr. Browning a mystery and a message of divine love, but no messenger of divine intention toward mankind." \* That the frenzied words concerning death in this poem do not represent the poet's constant tonic faith may be seen from the following citations:—

"Earth is no goal but starting place of man." †

"I know the earth is not my sphere,  
For I cannot so narrow me but that I still exceed it." ‡

"What's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes—  
Man has forever." §

"If this be all—(I must tell Festus that)  
And other life awaits us not—for one,  
I say 'tis a poor cheat, ■ stupid bungle,  
A wretched failure. I, for one, protest  
Against it and I hurl it back with scorn." ||

"Have you found your life distasteful?  
My life did and does smack sweet.  
Was your youth and pleasure wasteful?  
Mine I saved and hold complete.  
Do your joys with age diminish?  
When mine fails me I'll complain.  
Must in death your daylight vanish?  
My sun sets to rise again." ¶

Sympathetic, too, is Browning's verse with that great word "salvation"; salvation through suffering, as it was spoken and as it was lived

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\* "Life and Letters of Robert Browning," p. 360.

† "The Ring and the Book." ‡ "Pauline."

§ "The Grammarian's Funeral." || "Paracelsus."

¶ "At the Mermaid."

## The Vision

by the Divine Man. Browning was an optimist, but his optimism did not blind him to the hurt and the sin of the world. He was an optimist, not because he would not see, but because he saw—across all the murk and dark of sin—a Deliverer. The world had gone wrong, but Eternal Love had made provision for its needs. At the heart of all is tenderness and salvation. This redemptive note is the divine note—

“I think this the authentic sign and seal  
Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad  
And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts,  
Into a rage to suffer for mankind  
And recommence at sorrow.” \*

Love then leaps toward Calvary, and the sorrowful leaves of the bitter tree are for the healing of the nations. The Christ, God’s love incarnate, suffers, and through the miracle of the suffering comes the miracle of salvation. Love will save. Across the world-blackness falls the radiance of this assurance. Love, divine love, working steadily, working wisely, working ever, will win its own. Salvation may be long delayed but it will come—

“My own hope as a sun will pierce  
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched,  
That after Last returns the First,  
Though a wide compass round be fetched;  
That what began best, can’t end worst,  
Nor what God blest once, prove accurst.” †

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\* “Balaustion’s Adventure.” † “Apparent Failure.”

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This salvational process, according to Browning, has no time walls. The poet is a staunch upholder of the "Larger Hope," and will not limit the redemptive process to the years that belong to time. The future, too, holds its salvational agencies, its fires of purification, its opening of the eyes that were blind. Even Guido, the hardened villain, is not beyond the reach of a saving love—

"I avert my face, nor follow him  
Into that sad, obscure, sequestered state  
Where God un wakes, but to re wake the soul,  
He else made first in vain: which must not be."\*

It is time to end these bewildering citations. Rome cannot be done in a day, nor can Browning be packed into an essay postscript. Though in this hurrying exposition we may have missed the great thinker's way and blundered in the telling, it is strength to know that Browning comes to Bethlehem and to Calvary, and that the Christ he finds there—

"Stands confessed as the God of salvation,"

Is—

"He who trod,  
Very man and very God,  
This earth in meekness, shame and pain,"†

"On the whole subject of Christology," says Mr. Low, "the poet moves in an intellectual atmosphere identical with that of the believ-

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\* "The Ring and the Book." † "Christmas Eve."

## The Vision

ing and adoring church. There is something nourishing to faith and hope in the fact that, while in these days the face of the God-man may have become less real than it was, because we have been forced to behold it through the murky atmosphere of unbelief, and has faded more or less into indistinctness because wreathed in the mists of speculation or clouded with the smoke of criticism, so masculine a thinker as Browning, is so deeply convinced of the divine personality and superhuman character of the Christ." \*

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\* "The Theology of Modern Literature," p. 212.



FAITH'S CHORUS

"Ours is a world in which the unseen is revealed through incarnation. The storms incarnate the strength in God's arm. The harvests incarnate his thoughts of bounty. The landscapes incarnate God's beauty; and friendships God's affection. Thus, also, Jesus Christ incarnates God's mind and heart. This wondrous being is a fact in nature as real as any mountain or star. To each he comes with overtures of friendship. To each he whispers, 'The world is your Father's house, the morning is his smile, the darkness his curtains, the clouds his chariots.' He bids us journey forth with song for God is in all the perfumed air; with confidence, for as the planet sweeps the body forward, a divine purpose sweeps the soul upward; with penitence, for he who sympathizes will also pardon and forgive; with aspiration, for he who owns a million worlds will surely provide one for him who now seems a 'God in exile;' with hope, for when the body falls into the grave, the soul is caught up by arms invisible, indeed, but infinite."—*The Influence of Christ in Modern Life* (Newell Dwight Hillis), p. 278.

## CHAPTER XI.

### FAITH'S CHORUS.

WHEN the Christ ascended the Mount of Transfiguration but three went with him, Peter, James and John. Only these beheld his glory. But now in blessed and expectant ascent is a great multitude, and from stainless heights comes the chorus of praise. Those first disciples, entranced with the vision, would tabernacle there on the glory heights; these present-day followers come swiftly down to spread far and wide the story of the mountain miracle of whiteness and the awful vision of Loveliness.

Yet though they come directly and quickly down, they speak not all to us in the same words of what they have seen and heard. Before each the Christ has been transfigured, yet those transfigurations were not the same. Herein is the largeness and the baffling many-sidedness of the Christ revelation in the Sacred Book and in the individual experiences of those who love him. To Peter he wears one look, to James another, and yet another to John. Christ is not one. There are many Christs. But the likenesses fit one into the other and the many notes are all accordant.

This variety and unity in variety is what

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we should expect. Every man must see the Christ from a view point in every way his own. And through all the mental idiosyncrasies and soul strangenesses of the individual man, must the Christ be revealed. He can never be the same to two. From the West as well as from the East must men come to Bethlehem, and the roads are never the same. Nor of all that mighty throng streaming toward Calvary do two come together. Christ is the answer to all the needs of the world; and as the needs are many and varying, so must the answers be.

Now all this makes for richness. We have not a single painting, but a spacious gallery; not the clear sweetness of the solo, but a mighty chorus of faith. Our pleasant task it is to gather from the golden mass a few of the more distinctive notes.

To begin, we find the note of *comradeship* sounded by an American singer, Annie Trumbull Slosson; not full cadenced, but tuneful and sweet. Here the Christ is presented in human and intimate way, the Friend, the Companion, the Comrade. So has "Fishin' Jimmy" dreamed of him and found him. The story is almost an "idyl in its morning freshness and charm." "Fishin' Jimmy" was a very sorry theologian, and the words of the Savior, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," he interpreted most unimagina-

## Faith's Chorus

tively and literally. He loved to think of Christ first of all as a real fisherman and as used to all the toil and hardships of the fisherman's life, losing nothing thereby of winningness and might, but the rather gaining and entering in every way into an understanding of the toiler's lot and life. This fisherman Christ was very real to old "Jimmy," and when quite alone he might have been overheard in earnest colloquy with his unseen Friend. He didn't make any ado about this communion, but none the less was his rough nature sweetened and ennobled thereby, and surely, though slowly, the higher meanings of the Christ story came to him. He loved his dog and more and more he came to love men. Christ was Comrade, but he was an inspiring comrade. The old fisherman yearned to do something that would show this Comrade that his words were heeded and that "Fishin' Jimmy" was a fisher of men. The opportunity came at last, though not as he had wished it. A party of venturesome boys ascending Mount Lafayette was reported lost. A storm was brewing and the fisherman started to their rescue, saying, "If he couldn't be a fisher of men mebbe he know'd nuff to ketch boys." The boys found their way back drenched, though unhurt, but the old man lost his footing and was brought home bruised and bleeding. "The old angler did not suffer—we

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were so glad of that. But he did not appear to know us and his talk seemed strange. It rambled on faintly, softly, like one of his own mountain brooks, babbling of green fields, of sunny summer days, of his favorite sport, and ah! of other things. But he was not speaking to us. A sudden awed hush and thrill came over us, bending to catch the low words we all at once understood what only the bishop put into words as he said, half to himself in a sudden, quick, broken whisper, 'God bless the man, he's talking to the Master.' 'Yes, sir, that's so,' went on the quiet voice, ' 'twas only a dog, sure enough; 'twant even a boy, as ye say, and ye ast me to be a fisher of men. But I ain't had no chance for that, somehow; mebbe I ain't fit for 't. I'm only jist a poor old fisherman, "Fishin' Jimmy," ye know, sir,' and the old man went on telling about how he thought he ought to have risked his life for his dog—that he was glad at least that he could do that much. . . . But, suddenly, a strange light came over the thin face, the soft gray eyes opened wide, and he cried out with the strong voice we had so often heard come ringing to us across the mountain streams above the sound of the rushing, 'Here I be, Sir! It's "Fishin' Jimmy," ye know, him ye useter call "James," when ye came 'long the shore of the pond an' I was a fishin.' I heern ye agin just now—

## Faith's Chorus

an' I—straightway—f'sook—my—nets—an'—  
follered.' '' \* And so to the Comrade Christ he  
went in the early morning.

Is it not a heartening voice? Is it not good  
to know of Comradeship and the stoop to the  
lowliest of the highest?

Such is the Christ to the ignorant fisherman.  
What is he to the scholar? Obviously the  
revelation cannot be the same. For what  
craves the scholar most? Is it not knowledge?  
He, the searcher after truth, would find it. His  
cry is ever, "more light, more light." A gather-  
er of truths, pebbles cast up by the wash  
of the wave, his would be the diver's plunge  
and the knowledge of the music and the moan-  
ing of the sea. He would go anywhere, dare  
anything for truth's sake. Truth is his Tan-  
talus. He would know. But is there light  
anywhere and the knowledge of life? The  
eager, restless eye turned skyward, beholds  
a star. And that star, Star of Bethlehem, is  
Star of Truth. *Knowledge* has come. The  
Interpreter has appeared. Truth incarnate  
walks among men. In Christ is the solution of  
life's problems. "He is the light that lighteth  
every man that cometh into the world." Clear  
sounding above all human voices is the majes-  
tic affirmation, "I am Truth." So have schol-

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\* "Fishin' Jimmy."

## Christ in English Literature

ars seen Jesus. This was the vision that came to Woolsey—

"I stood, methought, fast by heaven's outer gate  
When Plato, blindfold, humbly to the door  
Came with weak steps, if he might venture o'er  
The threshold doubting, or must wait,  
When he who in the Master's bosom lay,  
And saw the mysteries nearest to the throne,  
Drew nigh, and led the mild enthusiast on  
Up to the Eternal Word, Heaven's fount of day.  
'There,' said the apostle to the kindred mind,  
'Dwells truth, whose shadows thou wast fain to trace;  
There beauty, which thy dreams wandered to find;  
There love, which swells beyond the soul's embrace.'  
Then loosed the bandages, and the sage no more  
A sage but saint, beheld and knelt to adore."\*

The poem needs no interpretation. The Christ is here presented as *Truth*, the hem of whose garments even the great Plato but blindly touched; the gracious fulfillment of all the prophecies of a truth-hungry heart, answer to all prayers for light, the satisfaction of the intellect and food for the heart as well, Beauty and Love.

To Lowell the Christ is revealed as the sympathetic, *helping* Christ, the Christ whose beauty and whose glory is in his identification with the lowly, the lonely, the sin stricken. In a notable poem this thought finds full expression—

"I went to seek for Christ,  
And nature seemed so fair  
That first the woods and fields my youth enticed."

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\*Theodore Dwight Woolsey (Plato).

## Faith's Chorus

And so to the woods he goes seeking Christ.  
But he is not there. Nor in the gaiety of the  
morning and forest freshness is he to be found.  
Far from Hellenic naturalism is this New  
England singer. From the woods he comes to  
the Church, Christ's "tomb," but he is not  
there, and he saw,

"Fresh trodden prints of bare and bleeding feet,"

leading toward the city—these he followed,

"And in a hovel rude,  
With naught to fence the weather from his head,  
The King I sought for meekly stood;  
A naked, hungry child  
Clung round his gracious knee,  
And a poor, hunted slave looked up and smiled  
To bless the smile that set him free;  
New miracles I saw his presence do,  
No more I knew the hovel bare and poor;  
The gathered chips into a woodpile grew,  
The broken morsel swelled to goodly store.  
I knelt and wept. My Christ no more I seek,  
His throne is with the outcast and the weak." \*

This is also the gospel of Sir Launfal. This  
resplendent knight goes out in quest of the  
Holy Grail, and long years in distant lands he  
wanders, yet in vain. Bent, worn, disheart-  
ened, he returns at last to his native land and  
finds his own castle doors closed against him.  
In his solitariness and defeat a leper comes to  
him. Sir Launfal divides with this unfortu-  
nate his last mouldy loaf, when lo! the leper is  
transformed into the Shining One—

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\* "The Search."

## Christ in English Literature

"And the Voice that was calmer than Silence said,  
Lo! it is I, be not afraid;  
In many climes without avail  
Thou hast spent thy life for the Holy Grail;  
Behold it is here! the cup which thou  
Didst fill at the streamlet for me just now;  
This crust is my body broken for thee,  
This water his blood that died on the tree;  
The Holy Supper is kept indeed  
In whatso we share with another's need;  
Not what we give, but what we share,  
For the gift without the giver is bare.  
Who gives himself with his alms feeds three,  
Himself, his hungering neighbor and me." \*

These are but the modernized renderings of those noble words of the Master, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in. Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me." Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungred and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?" And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:34-40). Thus

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\* "Vision of Sir Launfal."

## Faith's Chorus

does New England's highest culture echo the words of the lowly Nazarene. (Christ is friend, brother, helper, coming not to the righteous, but to sinners; not to the rich, but to the poor; not to the mighty, but to the weak; not to the self-sufficing, but to the weary, the broken-hearted. The noblest tribute ever paid to Lowell's fine humanitarianism is this tribute he unconsciously paid to himself in his noble song of "The Helping Christ." Man of letters though he was, his heart was tenderly responsive to the needs of the lowly, and so he has sung of the Christ swift-coming as ministrant of a love divine.)

To Coleridge was yet another revelation, the revelation of Christ as *Savior*. Lowell looked without and said, "Helper"; Coleridge looked within and said, "Savior." Lowell looking without sees only the world's distress, its poverty, its wretchedness—sees almshouses and jails and fagots and whips for slaves—blots on God's fair world; Coleridge, with keener vision, sees beneath the outward wretchedness the inner hurt. (Lowell beholds wretchedness, Coleridge sin.) The Christ that appeared to the New Englander would not have satisfied the author of the "Ancient Mariner." He felt that sin had cast its awful blight upon the world, and that no mere tinkering with man's outward condition, would suffice.

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Something must be had deeper going than all that. Outward wretchedness was but a faint transcript of the inward malady. The world was cursed, not by poverty or body slavery, but by sin. What was the tyranny of debt or of the slave driver to the tyranny of appetite? What was the prick of the goad to the sting of conscience? What were stripes laid on the body to the mutilations of the soul? Would outward deliverance suffice? Nay, nay. Men, first of all, need to be delivered from sin, the love of it, the stain of it, the sting of it. The first step in evangelization is to wake within man the consciousness of his need of salvation, to show him how blind and sinful and undone and weak he is. "Evidences of Christianity! I am weary of the word. Make a man feel the want of it, the self-knowledge of the need of it, and you may safely trust it to its own evidence." This exclamation comes to us freighted with the experience of the poet. It is distinctly autobiographical. In this way had *he* come, and the memory of that journey from the arid land of Unitarianism into his full, rich faith impelled by a great need, was vivid and strong. Coleridge had fallen into the clutch of the opium habit, and his long, ineffectual struggle with this infirmity, the sense of moral weakness and of sin working inward contrition, made him seek for a more practical and sup-

## Faith's Chorus

porting religion than he had known in his early years, and so he learns that the root of faith is in man's sense of need, and the experience that the redemption that is in Christ meets that need. This is the ultimate and most satisfying evidence, and Coleridge could have sung with Whittier—

“In joy of inward peace or sense  
Of sorrow over sin,  
He is his own best evidence,  
His witness is within.” \*

Christ is Savior. Our poet had felt his power, and above all other visions of him was the vision of his redeeming love. )

To this higher reach Rossetti did not attain. This Hebrew sense of sin was not for him. Of the quiver of a heart conscience-stricken and the moanings of a soul enslaved and sorrowing, he knew little. Rossetti's was ever a Greek lightness, though he missed the Attic gaiety, and the problem of sin had no attraction for his muse. His was but one life-vision, the vision of beauty. Earth's happiness is in the possession of beauty; earth's sorrow in its marring and its loss. Nor was he, as is too often charged, the dreamer of a mere sensuous beauty. That outward beauty he knew, but he knew more than that, and beauty in all its higher forms of moral and spiritual

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\* “Our Master.”

## Christ in English Literature

perfection entranced him and enslaved him. Nay, even in his most sensuous dreamings is there the hint, the prophecy of the beauty that is higher and abiding—

“Sometimes thou seemest not thyself alone,  
But as the meaning of all things that are;  
A breathless wonder shadowing forth afar  
Some heavenly solstice hushed and halcyon,  
Whose unstirred lips are music’s visible tone;  
Whose eyes the sun-gate of the soul unbar,  
Being of its furthest fires oracular;—  
The evident life of all life sown and mown.”\*

Thus in the very whirl of wings earth-heavy is there the appealing note of the spiritual, the beauty that is from above.

Into Rossetti’s soul there is but one approach—through the Gate Beautiful. Through this gate came the Christ as Comrade, Friend, Savior? Not so is the poet’s dream. *Christ is the incarnation of spiritual beauty*, gathering up in his own person all moral and spiritual whitenesses and lovelinesses, drawing so to him the heart of the world. Christ saves men but it is a salvation coming through the greater magnetism, the superior attraction of the higher beauty. Thus, in one of his poems, when Mary, leaving the festal procession and seeking Christ, is importuned most ardently by her lover, who seeks to draw her away—

“Why wilt thou cast the roses from thy hair?  
Nay, be thou all a rose-wreath, lips and cheek.

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\* “Heart’s Compass.”

## Faith's Chorus

Nay, not this house—that banquet house we seek;  
See how they kiss and enter; come thou there.  
This delicate day of love we two will share  
Till at our ear love's whispering night shall speak.  
What, sweet one—holds't thou still the foolish freak?  
Nay, when I kiss thy feet they'll leave the stair." \*

Thus is the tropical seductiveness of the temptation portrayed. But the vision of the Christ beauty is all appealing—

"Oh, loose me! Seest thou not my Bridegroom's face  
That draws me to Him? For his feet my kiss,  
My hair, my tears he craves to-day; and oh!  
What words can tell what other day and place  
Shall see me clasp those blood-stained feet of His?  
He needs me, calls me, loves me, let me go." †

A tenderer note comes from the Highlands. This Scotch song has tears in it and a haunting sweetness, and bides with us at the eventide, mating in delicate melody the softness of the shadows and the tremulous shimmer of stars. It has been mutilated, this lyric gospel of Barrie and Watson, buffeted by irate ecclesiastics because it seemed but illy to correspond with angular theologies. But the heart of the world resents this mutilation. There is no severer commentary on the folly of would-be defenders of the faith than this hacking of Barrie's idylls and savage onslaughts on the dream-children of Ian Maclaren. For these representatives of the new Scotch school have done more than any other men of their day

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\* "Mary Magdalene at the Door of Simon the Pharisee." †Ib.

## Christ in English Literature

in presenting the *attractiveness* of a life, both human and divine, and in Christ pictures of imperishable loveliness, have revived the drooping faiths of men. Whatever the theological aberrations of these artists, whatever the heresy of their delicate work as tried by council standards, unflagging and undoubting is their loyalty to the Christ. In one of Maclaren's stories, a saintly aunt is talking to the young minister about his first sermon, and these are her wise, sweet words: "Ye maun, laddie, that they're no clever and learned like what ye are, but just plain country foulk, ilka wi' his ain temptation an' a' sair trachled wi' mony cares o' this world. They'll need a clear word tae comfort their herts and show them the way everlasting. Ye'll say what's richt, nae doot o' that, and a'boddy 'll be pleased wi' ye, but oh, laddie, be sure ye say a gude word for Jesus Christ." "Say a gude word for Jesus Christ." Ah! that, please God, he will. The time for the sermon comes at last and the young minister stands in the pulpit. He had not let slip the message. "Texts I can never remember, nor, for that matter, the words of the sermon; but the subject was 'Jesus Christ,' and before he had spoken five minutes I was convinced, who am outside dogmas and churches, that Christ was present. The preacher faded from before one's eyes, and there rose the figure of the Nazarene,

## Faith's Chorus

best lover of every human soul, with a face of tender patience such as Sarto gave the Master in the Church of the Annunziata, and stretching out his hand to old folk and little children as he did before his death in Galilee. His voice might be heard any moment, as I have imagined it in my lonely hours by the winter fire or on the solitary hills—soft, low and sweet, penetrating like music to the secret of the heart, ‘Come unto me, . . . and I will give you rest.’ ” \*

The “gude word for Jesus Christ” had been spoken. Watson, open-eyed to all processes of scientific thought and theological reconstruction, views such with calm unconcern, knowing that they cannot touch the heart of faith, Jesus of Nazareth. “Many traditions have been swept away, many theories laid aside, but above the dust of the controversy rises the face of Christ. Surely there has been no age, since that early morn when the echo of his footsteps was still on earth and his very appearance in the flesh was remembered, wherein Christians have been so anxious to understand what Jesus was and what he taught, nor has there been since the days of the Roman martyrs a time wherein there has been such devotion to his person, whether you gather the evidence from the Sal-

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\* “His Mother’s Sermon.”

## Christ in English Literature

vation Army, which, with all its apparent extravagancies, is touched with a noble and sincere heroism, or the missions whose martyrs are taking possession of Africa for the Lord." \*

Metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties this Scotsman brushes aside, seeing their worthlessness. Creeds are but impedimenta. The puzzles of theology are but of little moment. The dynamic of religion is the person of Christ. Christ is Christianity. "The passion for Jesus has no analogy in comparative religion; it has no parallel in human experience. It is a flame of unique purity and intensity. . . . Men were lit as torches in Nero's garden and women flung to the wild beasts of the amphitheater; and for what? For a system, for a cause, for a church? they had not enough knowledge of theory to pass a Sunday-school examination; they had no doctrine of the Holy Trinity. . . . They died in their simplicity for Him 'whom having not seen ye love,' and the name of the Crucified was the last word that trembled on their dying lips. . . . When Jesus founded his religion on personal attachment, it seemed a fond imagination; the perennial vitality of Christianity has been his vindication." †

But how has the Christ revealed himself

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\* "Cure of Souls," p. 149. † "The Mind of the Master," p. 195.

## Faith's Chorus

to these worshipers? *As the lover of men.* When Margaret Ogilvie dies the last words upon her saintly lips are God and love. And this, too, is Maclaren's vision and strength. Love, and love so full and rich and strong that it overflows all the waste fields even of sin and death, making everywhere alive. For be it observed, it is a love not uncommunicative and self-contained, but ever busy with the miracle of self-disclosure and the impartation of its strength. Christ is Love, love helping. And all the heroes and heroines on these good Scotch pages, all the beautiful Christians there, are not the wise or the learned or the rich, but the helping ones; they who have learned of the Master's secret. The author is in full sympathy with Drumsheugh, as in agonized prayer by the bedside of the dying hero-doctor, he cries, "Almighty God . . . dinna be hard on Weelum MacLure, for he's na been hard on anybody in Drumtochty. Forgive him what he's dune wrang an' dinna cuist it up tae him. . . . Mind the folk he's helpit." \* Ah! yes, "mind the folk he's helpit"; mind his life-long, helping love. Fit was the text inscribed upon the cross above his grave, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

To this helping, strengthening, rescuing love

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\* "The Doctor's Last Journey."

## Christ in English Literature

of Christ the artist puts no limit. God's love is boundless—

“There's a wideness in God's goodness like the wideness of the sea.”

Who dares fix bounds to salvation through love?

For this wide charity he has been viciously attacked. His story of “Post Redemption” is held as worthy of obloquy, because the unwillingness to set metes and bounds to God's saving love is plainly manifest. The story, as is well known, is that of the postman of Drumtochty who, with numberless good and saving traits, rests under the national curse, a love for Scotch whisky. One day on returning home “Posty” plunges into a swollen stream and rescues a drowning child, but is himself, after lifting the girl into her mother's arms, swept back into the flood. The village casuists meet to decide “Posty's” post-mortem fate. He loved whiskey, that was plain, and great was the weakness and the sin, but he had many lovable and endearing traits as well, and this last act of heroism seemed to count for much in the minds of the rural theologians. Carmichael, the Free Kirk minister, advances this argument: that, if it be true that if any man hurts one of God's bairns it were better for him to have a millstone tied round his neck and be cast into the sea, then surely there is hope for one who,

## Faith's Chorus

at the cost of his own life, saves one of these little ones from death. And the conclusion was received by Drumtochty with general satisfaction. For this inimitable sketch and for this conclusion, which any man "with any bowels of mercy" must accept, Ian Maclaren has been pronounced as one who would have us "accept mere natural goodness as a substitute for Christianity," who would "invent a new moral category for men like the Drumtochty postman and slip them through into paradise by some postern gate" and who on his "own responsibility would open up a new route to the Heavenly Land and map out a way of salvation of which the Bible knows nothing." For this he is denounced as the literary champion of the Larger Hope, and a reverend critic,\* with barbarian guffaw over his own graceless witticism, bids Ian Maclaren go to hell and there test the soundness of his theory. Such carpings will never be taken seriously by any considerable number. Humanity scorns such acids. Defective, no doubt, is the theology of these Scotch singers, defective because it is "red ripe at its heart," but the possible theological aberrations of these warm-hearted Scotsmen must ever be dwarfed by the positiveness of their faith. Much they have given

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\* "The Theology of Modern Literature" (Rev. S. A. Law), p. 343.

## Christ in English Literature

us is helpful and constructive, whatever they may have left unsaid, and the world is warmer and life more meaningful because these have sung of the love of God as incarnate and magnetic in Jesus of Nazareth.

Search we for a deeper note? We may hear it in the music-sermon of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Others may see in the Christ, the Helper, the Comrade, incarnate Wisdom, Beauty, Love. Mrs. Browning sees above all *the divine Passion*. To her, too, he is Wisdom, Beauty, Comfort, but going further, going deeper, she thinks of him as *the Suffering God*. Mrs. Browning's Christology moves chiefly in the closing chapters of the Gospel story. Before her ever is the humiliation, the shame, that was put upon the Divine Man. She can never shut out the sight of that brutal mob surging toward the place of skulls. Above all else is Calvary. Like the great apostle to the Gentiles hers is the Gospel of the cross. That Mrs. Browning's was a reasoned theology we cannot believe, yet with whatever of incompleteness grasping the central truth of Christianity; salvation through the cross. The earth to the singer is pain-pierced and sad—

"I dwell amid the city ever.  
The great humanity which beats  
Its life along the stony streets  
Like a strong and unswerved river

## Faith's Chorus

In a self-made course;  
I sit and hearken while it rolls,  
*Very sad and very hoarse,*  
Certes is the flow of souls."\*

And the city, whose "voice is a complaint," stands for humanity. The world is sad and its passionless griefs look out appealingly. Suffering is in the world and sin. God must suffer with his world. In her woman's heart she has reasoned so. Love must seek identification with its own. To the very last drop of all man's woe the Father will drink—

"The Christ, then, is the Infinite God  
Journeying toward Calvary."

This prophetic intimation comes to the Virgin Mary even as the Babe is sleeping on her breast. She has cried—

"Art thou a King, then? Come, his universe,  
Come crown we him a King!  
Pluck rays from all such stars as never fling  
Their light where fell a curse,  
And make a crowning for this Kingly brow."

But the Child stirs not. The mother's mood changes. The dread fear of that which might be done smites her, and as she weeps the Child wakes—

"That tear fell not on thee,  
Beloved, yet thou stirrest in thy slumber!  
*Thou, stirring not for glad sounds,*  
So quickly hast thou heard  
A tear fall silently?"†

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\* "The Souls Traveling."

† "The Virgin Mary to the Child Jesus."

## Christ in English Literature

Even in infancy the anticipatory consciousness of his relation to a world sorrow. But this tenderness cannot turn aside the blow. Defiant, revengeful, sin raises its hand against the Sinless One and on bitter tree he hangs—

“No crown! the woe instead  
Is heavy on his head  
Pressed inward on his brain  
With a hot and clinging pain,  
Till all tears are prest away,  
And clear and calm his vision may  
Peruse the black abyss.  
No rod, no scepter is  
Holden in his fingers pale;  
They close instead upon the nail.”

Yet the sufferer draws not back—

“Will He be uncompassionate  
Alone to his proper soul?  
Yea, will he not lift up  
His lips from the bitter cup,  
His brows from the dreary weight,  
His hands from the clenching cross?”

Nay—

“The love and woe being interwound,  
He cleaveth to the woe  
And putteth forth heaven’s strength below—  
To bear.”\*

Must this dread thing be?—

“O man! and is thy nature so defiled  
That all could cleanse thee not—without the flow  
Of blood—the life blood—*His* and streaming *so?*” †

Even so defiled. Only the cross can save. But Mrs. Browning will not keep the cross here on

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\* “The Seraphim.” † Ib.

## Faith's Chorus

earth. Its mark of suffering she sees in heaven even now. Christ bears still the marks of sorrow. Now do earth's griefs weigh upon him—

“O holder of the balance, laughest thou?  
Nay, Lord! be gentler to our foolishness,  
For His sake who assumed our dust and turns  
On thee pathetic eyes  
Still moistened by our tears.”\*

The Passion is not ended yet—

“And now He pleadeth up in heaven  
For our humanities,  
Till the ruddy light on seraphs' wings  
In pale emotion dies.  
They can better bear his Godhead's glare  
Than the pathos of his eyes.”†

This note is distinctive. To Mrs. Browning the drama of the Atonement is yet unfolding. The cross is still upreared; it has been but transplanted to heaven. Love's heart still bleeds, and must bleed so long as sin is, so long as sorrow wasteth. Nor is this merely spectacular, for in it she would find a source of comfort and of strength. Through this ever present humiliation the Christ may the more fully enter into sympathy with mortal grief and shame—

“O Christ, come tenderly!  
By thy forsaken Sonship in the red,  
Drear wine-press—by the wilderness outspread—  
And the lone garden where thine agony  
Fell bloody from thy brow—by all of those  
Permitted desolations, comfort mine!  
No earthly friend bring near me, interpose

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\* “The Measure.” † “The Poet's Vow.”

## Christ in English Literature

No deathly angel 'twixt my face and thine,  
But stoop thyself to gather my life's rose  
And smile away my mortal to Divine." \*

Sorrow may come to us but we will not murmur. *He* sorrowed, too, and suffering so he proved his love. What is *our* grief to his?

"Take from my head the thorn-wreath brown,  
No mortal grief deserves that crown.  
O supreme Love, chief misery,  
The sharp regalia are for *Thee*."

And so whatever seeming ill befalls us it is well.

"For us—whatever's undergone  
Thou knowest, willest what is done,  
Grief may be joy misunderstood;  
Only the Good discerns the good,  
I trust Thee while my days go on.

"I praise Thee while my days go on;  
I love Thee while my days go on!  
Through dark and dearth, through fire and frost,  
With emptied arms and treasure lost  
I thank Thee while my days go on!" †

Let us close the book. It is well to stop here. Supremest suffering evidencing such boundless love has issue in this trust and all its sweet abandon. There are many things the wisest can never understand, many mysteries that shall be shadowed always. We cannot see. God help us to sing these hymns of perfect trust, melodic echoes of the Master's words in the long ago, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me."

\* "A Thought for a Lovely Death-Bed." \* † "De Profundis."

## THE OUTLOOK

"We understand ourselves to be risking no new assertion, but simply repeating what is already the convictions of the greatest of the age when we say that the Christian religion can never pass away; that the 'gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.' Were the memory of this Faith never so obscured, as indeed, in all times the coarse passions and perceptions of this world do all but obliterate it in the hearts of most; yet in every pure soul it finds a new martyr, a new missionary, till the great volume of universal History shall be closed and man's destinies are fulfilled in this earth. 'It is a height to which the human species were fated and enabled to attain; and from which, having once attained it they can never retrograde.'"—*Miscellaneous Essays (Carlyle)*, p. 451.

"Economic science is good, but economic science enlightened by the Spirit of the Gospel, the spirit of enthusiasm for humanity is better. . . . In this industrial reformation the voice of the men whose duty it is to remind us that man does not live by bread alone should be potent on the side of a finer justice and a more philanthropic spirit. The Christian Gospel has had a rebirth in more than one perplexed age. The labor troubles of the nineteenth century will find no more effectual solvent. Economics must be aided by ethics; the commercial spirit should be tempered by the Christian feeling of the brotherhood of man. The pure Christianity to which Leclaire gave expression in his last will and testament is still the strongest force making for industrial and social progress."—*Profit Sharing Between Employee and Employer (Nicholas Paine Gilman)*, p. 297.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE OUTLOOK.

OUR chief concern is ever with the future. What will the to-morrows bring? This "new feeling for Christ," is it passing or abiding? Has it touched letters with the breath of a flickering impulse or the power of an enduring principle? The mighty forces that in latter-day evolutions have swept the world toward Bethlehem, are they spent or potent yet and creative? This enthronement of our Lord, is it the whimsical act of a heated mood or the intelligent though exultant deed of a great conviction? And if in true loyalty he has been crowned will the reign be long or short?

The answer: Even more than the yesterdays will the to-morrows feel the spell of Christ. Everywhere are there evidences that the nearing literature will be dominated by Jesus of Nazareth. The trend of the age is Christward. The to-morrows will be born in Bethlehem.

Letters will come increasingly to Christ for inspiration. This inspiration cannot be found elsewhere. The old fountains are drying up.

One time literature found its inspiration in mythology. Deep-rooted in myth are the Greek and Roman literatures. From the bold

## Christ in English Literature

glory of Homeric page to the feeblest sentence of decadent days we journey along a myth-sown track. No plant of literature but is rooted in this myth-mold. Ancient literature is chiefly the biography of gods and goddesses. The beginning and end of the quest is the Pantheon. There is little else besides. Nor did mythology die with Greece and Rome. Northern literatures are its flowerings. Early Scandinavian and English literatures are chiefly mythological, and the voices that ring out by Baltic and Irish seas are the voices of the gods. Conceived in this spirit is Dante's dream, and Milton was more beholden to mythology than to Christ for the materials of his song. Even the sober Cowper has hardly left off the sober phrasing of his Olney hymns before in stilted, artificial way he sings of nymphs and naiads, of fates and gods; of Hermes, of Pan, of Phœbus and the Venus all bewitching. But now the gods are dead, the Pantheon in ruins, the voices of eld quite silent. The mythological note, even to the artist, seems both archaic and false. It is quite certain that a new Homer must find other materials for his song. The "classical" will some day be the modern. Let Olympus go with all its gods.

Neither will literature find its life in science. Modified as it must be by the truths of science, it will look elsewhere for its inspirations. For,

## The Outlook

after all, the ultimate disclosure of science is the material. The universe it brings us is a world of things. It may be enlarged by telescope and microscope, but it is matter still. It is evident, then, that the value of science to literature has been enormously over-estimated. Is it of such moment to letters to know the universe is vaster than we had thought and in the making a million million years? Is a hard material fact food for the seer, though it bulk as large as Jupiter? Will not the pursuit of *things* seem ever to letters a profitless task?

The growing number of inventions, too, through applied sciences, and all that pretentious veneer called modern civilization, will it not seem to literature vulgar and unimportant? Have all these inventions and veneers made man nobler, kindlier, made human life sweeter and more worth the living? Granted that the quality of bread has been improved, has the quality of friendship come to like improvement? Granted that men can talk to each other a thousand miles apart, does it matter much if they have nothing of worth to say? The cable, with its continent-tyings, would it better never have vexed the ocean quiet if it carries no weighty message? Is the defiant whistle of the steam engine warranted if it draw not better men than the stage coach it

## Christ in English Literature

supplanted? Have not the specialists in science enormously exaggerated the importance of scientific knowledge? Knowledge, scientific knowledge, is, Mr. Huxley asserts, but another name for advancement, and he is "wholly unable to admit that either nations or individuals will really advance if their output draws nothing from the stores of physical science. An army without weapons of precision, and with no particular base of operations, might more hopefully enter upon a campaign on the Rhine, than a man devoid of a knowledge of what physical science has done in the last century upon a criticism of life." \* Now this is very clearly and strongly put, but for all its clearness and oracular tone we do not accept it. A knowledge of science does not seem to be wholly and solely necessary for the "criticism of life." Life, indeed, lies altogether without the confines of science, and instead of finding in this world adequate interpretation, cannot so much as be seen here. Mr. Huxley is unfortunate in his conclusion that life can be put under a microscope. The world of science, with all its admittedly rich mines, is yet small; the largest questions lie altogether outside its boundaries. Mr. Matthew Arnold, with unerring precision, puts his finger upon these grave limitations. "And for the generation of men

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\* "Critiques and Addresses," p. 263.

## The Outlook

there will be found, I say, to arise, when they have duly taken in the proposition that their ancestor was 'a hairy quadruped, furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habits,' there will be found to arise an invincible desire to relate this proposition *to the sense in us for conduct and to the sense in us for beauty*. But this the men of science will not do for us nor permit others to do." \* Into this higher world science will not go, and it is small wonder that Mr. Arnold pronounced it "wearying and unsatisfying." Utterly divorced is science from conduct and from beauty, and through such divorcement impotent and uninspirational. Obviously, applied science offers no field for literature, nor can theoretical science furnish the springs of literary endeavor.

Too sterile, also, for a noble literature, is the soil of democracy. Viewed connectedly with ethical and spiritual contexts democracy has largest meanings and sanest inspirations, but considered in its fragmentariness and detachment it lacks the lift of power. However exploited, democracy, in its purely economic, social and governmental aspects is without large literary fructuousness. Its ideals are too clayey, its aims fly far too low. Democracy has prairie breadth, but it lacks the mountain heights from which the living streams break

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\* "Discourses in America," p. 111.

## Christ in English Literature

forth. That in itself it can never furnish the inspiration of literature may be clearly seen in the work of Walt Whitman. This picturesque singer was not lacking in native gifts, hardly less richly endowed than Emerson, say, with most melodious though exotic utterance. He was first of all, as his admirers claim, the "poet of democracy." He is the lyrist of comradeship, the confident vaticinator of universal equality. If, in his exuberant egotism, he can think of nothing nobler than to "celebrate" himself, he is, in democratic accommodativeness, quite willing to share with you—

"And what I assume you shall assume;

For every atom belonging to me as good as belongs to you."\*

Along the "Open Road," of which Whitman sings, men journey with plain equality. Virile is this poet and strong, but he has not found his way into the heart. The frank embodiment of his creed, he is too often common and coarse. His democracy is ringed with naturalism not seldom prurient and gross. His work as a whole is harsh and bald, lacking the softened outline—utterance of him who holds communion with the invisible. The materials of his song are quarried by a cyclops, but they are builded neither into beauty nor grandeur. Huge cromlechs he could pile up with his giant strength, but the glory of the temple was

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\* "Leaves of Grass."

## The Outlook

beyond him. This was through the fault of method and ideal. His "Democratic Vistas" is a misnomer. The "vistas" are walls. Whitman has no vistas. He sees only the present, or if he build a road into the future it is immediately to block it up with his opaque materialism. Democracy beyond its present dull comforts does not care to look. Now this ox-eyed dullness does not satisfy us. It seemed not to satisfy Whitman. None has more clearly recognized than he his own limitations. In a noble passage he declares, "It was originally my intention, after chanting in 'Leaves of Grass' the songs of the body and existence, to then compose a further equally needed volume, based on these convictions of perpetuity and conservation which, enveloping all precedents, make the unseen soul govern absolutely at last. I meant, while in a sort continuing the theme of my first chants, to shift the slides and exhibit the problem and paradox of the same ardent and fully appointed personality entering the sphere of the resistless gravitation of spiritual law . . . But the full construction of such a work is beyond my powers and must remain for some bard in the future. The physical and the sensuous in themselves or in their immediate continuations retain holds upon me which I think are never entirely released.'" \* Whit-

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\* Preface to "Leaves of Grass."

## Christ in English Literature

man was wise in not making this attempt. The soil in which he was rooted grew not such a tree. This tree of life grows in other than democratic gardens. The poet can give us "leaves of grass," leaves that wither and die, but the leaves of the Tree of Life are above his reach.

It is quite clear that we cannot look to democracy as the inspirer of literature. Upon what, then, shall it feed, if neither upon mythology, science nor democracy? If Rudyard Kipling were set to answer the question he would say—upon force. The source of all his inspirations is might. Kipling worships power. He builds altars to forces. His heroes are soldiers, explorers, pioneers, representatives and incarnations all of power. The ship that "finds herself" awakes all his poetic fervor, for this ship is the triumph of might. The jungle has for him an irresistible fascination, for in its shadowed depths soft-footed panthers go, and the elephant with earth-shaking tread—despotic representations of power. Of all the gods he worships Mars most fervently and is the uncrowned "battle-lau-reate" of the world. Loving here and so Kipling's range is narrow. It lacks all vision save of the material. So earthy are his wares they may be handled. The fatness of the earth he brings, but he has no sky. In his own works,

## The Outlook

however, he furnishes the corrective of his philosophy. We see the darkness to which he leads. His books are ethical blurs. They are disfigured by moral confusion. Might is right. Power is self-justifying. Force needs no confessional. Let the strong possess the earth. Ruthless, bold, brutal, this young Indian will not soon convince us that noble literature can find its inspiration in an unethical force.

Nay, is not the drift away from the material, away from the outward, the mechanical and toward the inner, the immaterial, the spiritual? What means else the recent triumph of Romanticism and the glad surrender of the world to dream? A material realism has had its day. The world wants something more than the flat photographic details of its outward life. Not even in the fidelity of the execution of detail does it find a compensation for the absence of large meanings and noble perspectives. The world much prefers a dream forest of Arden where spring up the gladness and glory of life to the filth of real alleys and the hucksters strident voice.

Along with the revival of romanticism has come the religious novel. It came to conquer. From Zolaesque details and triflings men turn with eagerness to the discussion of religious themes. Any work of even respectable merit on such a subject is sure of a hearing. Along

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these new fictional ways the names even of mediocre authors have been carried far. The public seems not nicely discriminative. It likes the class and gives warmest welcome to all its representatives. The materials are multifiform. Every stock theological theme is seized upon and worked into fiction form. The foremost artists along with the lesser are entering this field. The large appreciation of Mr. James Lane Allen's religious prose poem, "The Reign of Law," showing not only a cultured love of melody but high themes set to exquisite music, is of largest significance. It is a sign that the reign of materialism is drawing to a close. Above all others the age in which we live has been most dominated by the material, and now appears the evidence that we have come to the turning of the tide. Immersed in the material as men are, they are panting for that which is higher, and welcome glimpses of the spiritual. With all the weight of a material civilization upon them, they are ever pressing toward the uplands of the spirit. The literature that would feed them must be other than the earthy. The world is hungering for the manna that comes down from the heavens. Long enough have men been living on the crust of things and now they would go down into the very deeps of life. The gulf stream is not more powerful in its clutch than is this mighty

## The Outlook

stream of human desire. As from the material grandeur of Rome in the early morning of her decline, humanity turned away through surfeit and profound unrest, so from the luxuries, the heavy sweets of the present civilization the world is turning with an ache in its heart, asking if there be not something better than it all. Humanity is still in the dark. The mystery of being girts it round. The gravest problems still wait solution. Unrifting clouds shut out the sun. Humanity cries for light. Sin reigns. All have passed beneath its yoke. All have felt its hard servitude. All have longed for freedom. Humanity cries for deliverance.

Pain persists. Sorrowing abides. Disease wastes. Death slays. The grave fills up its greedy maw. Humanity cries for the Comforter.

From whence shall deliverance come? Will not this be the question of the literature of tomorrow? Must it not, if life is the material with which it works, set itself to the answer of this deep questioning? Ignorance, how can it be banished? Social grievances, how shall they be remedied? Justice between man and man, how shall it be realized? Brotherhood, how shall it be forwarded? Appetite, how shall it be controlled? Passion, how shall it be mastered? Sorrow, how shall it be assuaged? The grave, through whom shall come the vic-

## Christ in English Literature

tory? So must letters question. And will not literature turn more and more to Him who alone can answer, who alone can help?

Salvation is not through philosophy. Only the few are fitted for such high climbings. Philosophy can never reach the mass. Even at its best it is for the patrician few and not for the plebeian many.

Salvation is not in education. Mere mind culture is of little worth. Civilization has no power to touch the heart.

Nor is there help in law. The world can never be legislated into virtue or happiness. Laws deal purely with the negative side of life, they can do nothing positive and constructive. Law is of little avail. To whom shall we go? To whom but to the Man of Galilee!

Literature concerning itself with life must come to Him who *is* life and shall find in Him the answer to its agonized questions. This is an invitation to no narrow field. The Christ-literature will be a universal literature, catholic, deep-going, wide as humanity's needs. Would literature portray beauty? It is found in Him; not the fading beauty of the outward, the material, but the unwithering beauty of the inward, the spiritual.

Would it deal with Force? Above all force-manifestations of the physical world is that

## The Outlook

outreach of power from the cross of Calvary, the measureless might of Him who, in Jean Paul's magnificent phrasing, with pierced hand lifted the gates of empire off their hinges and turned the channels of the centuries.

Would it sing of love? Where else in all the story of human deeds is a love like this of the Crucified One, unbounded and undying? Would it hold high above all present endeavor the radiant ideals which beckon men on? In the Christ the noblest ideals have already been realized, and to name the highest is to name Him.

Would it speak words of consolation to a despairing humanity? In what other tones than the Comforter's with the words that drop like balm—"Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God believe also in me"?

In a word, for the noble, the ideal literature of the to-morrow, the literature which shall be many-chorded as human life and meaningful with the travail of all the ages, the Judæan Peasant will be an all-sufficient inspiration. In the last analysis Christ will be found to be the Amen and Amen of letters even as of civilization, of conduct, of religion, and the world will come to see that in all the vast temple of enduring literature, from humblest foundation stone to mighty dome, there is naught but that finds its completeness in Him.











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